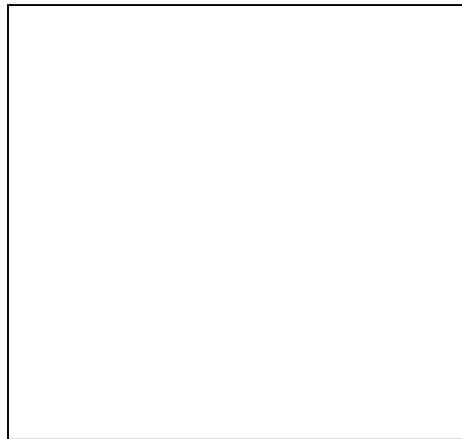


A Shift in Dharma

Changes in Conceptualisations of Faith Among Second-Generation Hindus in Oslo

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ABSTRACT

This is a study of a Hindu community in diaspora. Based on analysis of fieldwork data that was collected among second-generation North Indian Hindus in the city of Oslo, the thesis identifies various tendencies among informants that are described as changes in their conceptualisation of religion. The thesis argues that these changes amount to a convergence with conceptualisations of religion that are common in their Norwegian host society. The way that informants think about religion, in other words, appears to be approaching the way that many Norwegians think about religion.

One of the conclusions drawn from this observation is that although informants retain a clear sense of Hindu identity in terms of observable praxis and self-understanding, their concept of the category of religion displays structural similarities with concepts of religion found in Western European thought.

The transition between different types of conceptualisation is analysed as a shift between the Hindu notion of dharma, and Western conceptualisations of religion, such they are found in e.g. the traditions of Protestantism, and which are influential in Norway. While discussing this shift, the Hindu notion of dharma is proposed as a yardstick for important aspects of conceptualisations of religion among Hindus. The justification for doing so is taken from the argument that the notion of dharma is a supplier of assumptions and premises for concepts of religion that are common among Hindus.

The thesis provides several examples from the field data of shifts between dharma and Western European conceptualisations of religion. In this respect the thesis documents an important aspect of change in a diaspora Hindu community.

The thesis can be viewed or downloaded via WWW from the Oslo University Digital Library. See URL: www.digbib.uio.no

[Search terms: Ram Gupta, a shift in dharma, hinduism, hinduisme, migration studies, migrasjonsstudier, innvandring, history of religion, religion studies, religionshistorie, Oslo, Norway, Norge].

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract.....	1
Acknowledgements	5
Table of Contents.....	6

PART 1: FRAMEWORK

1 Preliminaries	10
1.1 Theme and Problem of Thesis	10
1.2 Structure of the Thesis	11
1.3 Definition of Terms Used	12
1.4 A Note on Spellings.....	13
1.5 Earlier Research.....	13
1.6 Indians in Norway	13
1.7 How many Hindus?	14
2 Method of Fieldwork	17
2.1 Two Fieldwork Phases.....	17
2.2 Selecting informants	17
2.3 Presentation of Fieldwork 2 Informants	18
2.4 Meeting My Informants.....	22
2.5 Conducting the Interviews.....	23
3 Method of Interpretation and Analysis	27
3.1 Introduction	27
3.2 Presentation of Interpretational Framework	27
3.3 Method of Textual Analysis	32
3.4 Remarks on Hermeneutics.....	34
4 Dharma and Western Religion	37
4.1 Introduction	37
4.2 What is Dharma?	37
4.3 Examples of Translation from The Bhagavadgita	38
4.4 Deciphering Dharma.....	39
4.5 Meanings of Dharma	40
4.6 Some Ramifications of Dharma	42
4.7 How Important Is Dharma?	44

4.8	The Western Concept of Religion	48
4.9	Conceptualisation of Religion in the Development of Christianity and in Language.....	48
4.10	Conceptualisation of Religion under Secularisation and Modernity	50
4.11	Features of Protestantism.....	52
4.12	Conclusion	52

PART 2: ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

5	We Hindus and I	56
5.1	Introduction	56
5.2	The Role of the Collective	57
5.3	The Individual.....	68
5.4	Conclusion.....	72
6	Who Can Be A Hindu?	73
6.1	Introduction	73
6.2	Can A Norwegian Become A Hindu?	74
6.3	More obstacles to conversion	81
6.4	Can a Hindu Convert?	84
6.5	Inter-Faith Dialogue	84
6.6	Discussing Religion.....	89
6.7	Conclusion	90
7	Apart from Religion	92
7.1	Introduction	92
7.2	Discussion of Fieldwork.....	93
7.3	Comparative Discussion	99
7.4	How does de-linking happen?	101
7.5	Conclusion	105
8	Reason to Believe	107
8.1	Introduction	107
8.2	The Diaspora Connection	108
8.3	Questions and Answers	111
8.4	Conclusion	117
9	To Believe Or To Do?	120
9.1	Introduction	120
9.2	The Field Data	121
9.3	Theoretical Perspectives	132
9.4	Conclusion	137

PART 3: CONCLUSION

10 Conclusion 140

Bibliography 144

Glossary 149

APPENDIX

Interview Guide for Fieldwork 2 154

Transcript from Interview with Shanti 157

Select Bibliography 167

PART 1

FRAMEWORK

1 PRELIMINARIES

1.1 Theme and Problem of Thesis

This is a study of the North-Indian Hindu diaspora in Oslo. The study centres on the following question: *How does Hinduism as a belief system change when it exists in a Northern European cultural environment?*

This and related questions are discussed against field data collected among second-generation North-Indian Hindus in Oslo. The relationship between host society influence and changes in religious outlook among young Hindus is explored on the level of individual thought and conceptualisation of religion, as opposed to changes in praxis.

To interpret the field data I have taken the Hindu conceptions of dharma as a point of departure. First, I show the reader how dharma is realised in conceptualisations of religion that I find among informants. Secondly, by exploring certain tendencies in the data that contrast with dharma, and comparing them with Western conceptualisations of religion, I show how a shift seems to be taking place among informants towards notions about religion that are common in their host society. My justification for using the dharma concept in this way is that it in effect serves as a conceptual framework that informs the way many Hindus think about religion. I argue this point later.

The empirical basis of the thesis is data collected during fieldwork among Hindus in Oslo. The fieldwork was conducted over two periods, in 1996 (Fieldwork 1) and 1998-99 (Fieldwork 2). The discussions and analyses are primarily based on data from Fieldwork 2, which consists of interviews with 12 informants. Further details of the fieldwork are explained in the next chapter, “Method of Fieldwork”.

The framework for analysis and interpretation of the field data is structured around a set of five dichotomies. These I have constructed by taking five selected aspects in the Hindu concept of dharma and juxtaposed them to the same number of complementary aspects that describe Western conceptualisations of religion. Each dichotomy defines a perspective for discussion of the field data.

An example of how I use one of these dichotomies can be seen in chapter 5 (“We Hindus and I”), where I discuss the relationship between collective and the individual. Here I

show that although the data reveals a strong collective orientation in young Hindus' experience of religion, a sense of dissatisfaction with the collective seems to be on the increase. The chapter relates how some informants are actively pursuing a more personal and individualistic platform for their religious quest. I interpret this as a departure from the collective orientation in dharma, while also discussing whether this departure is due to the influence of a certain individualism which is common in Western conceptualisations of religion.

A key word of the thesis is conceptualisation. This means that the thesis focuses on changes in what informants *think* about their religion, rather than on what they *do*. The thesis is therefore not an account of ritual practices and modes of worship; for example, I do not discuss organisational patterns, nor do I discuss questions directly related to transmission and perpetuation of tradition. One of my reasons for using this approach is that developments in peoples' observable practices do not necessarily reflect changes in beliefs and attitudes – and vice versa. It is therefore important to differentiate between praxis and conceptualisation in order to understand certain developments in the religion of a diaspora community, such as the North-Indian Hindus in Oslo. Developments in conceptualisations can have far-reaching implications, even though they are not readily observable in forms of praxis. Many changes and developments will escape us unless we pay attention to conceptualisation, I believe. This, then, is where dharma is helpful.

This emphasis on conceptual change is, as far as I have been able to tell, different from in most other studies on diaspora Hinduism.

1.2 Structure of the Thesis

The thesis is divided into three parts. Part 1 consists of four chapters. This first chapter presents the problem and structure of the thesis and some preliminary information. The second chapter discusses the fieldwork process and includes a presentation of informants. My method of analysis and interpretation of the field data are presented in chapter three. The last chapter of Part 1 is devoted to a broader theoretical discussion of the concept of dharma and Western conceptualisations of religion. Part 2 follows with discussion and analysis of the field data through five chapters. These five chapters form the bulk of the thesis. Part 3 consists of one chapter only, "Conclusion".

The Appendix includes Interview Guide and a transcript of the interview with Shanti, one of my Fieldwork 2 informants. A select bibliography is also included.

1.3 Definition of Terms Used

First-generation means persons born in India of Indian parents.

Second-generation refers to persons whose parents were both born in India, but who themselves are either born in Norway or have lived in Norway since early childhood.¹

Dharma refers to customary, i.e. not Neo-Hindu, notions of the term.²

Hindu, Hinduism refers to the body of religion so called in general usage, the doctrines, rituals and cultural traditions associated with persons who say they are Hindus.

Unless specified, the term *South Asian* refers to persons of any religion from the whole Indian sub-continent.

Western conceptualisations of religion refers to notions about the category “religion” that coincide with features of Western European and North-American Christianity. For the sake of convenience, “Western conceptualisations of religion” is hereafter shortened into Western religion.

As a working definition for the purposes of the thesis, *diaspora*, whether modified as Hindu, Indian or South Asian, refers to persons or communities who are now settled outside South Asia, but whose ancestors were born in South Asia. This working definition does not address the various modes and reasons for migration out of South Asia, or the circumstances of these communities in their respective host societies.

Since the term can have several different meanings and references, I include a few remarks: A problem in connection with using the term is that “The Hindu diaspora” suggests a single more or less unified community. This is not the case, however, as the Hindu diaspora is in many respects highly heterogeneous, even when correcting for that not all Hindus come from India. In addition, within the Hindu diaspora the history of migration is so diverse that one could arguably say that many of the Hindu communities around the world belong to different diasporas. The cultural diversity of India is reflected in the Hindu diaspora in that neither religion, language, economy or migration history are obvious adhesives that bind all these Hindus together, as these factors might in the case of other diasporas.³ To avoid any connotations to a unified community, I use lower-case *d* for the term.

Words that are not explained in the text are included in a glossary of terms used at the end of the thesis. As a rule, italics are used for these terms when they occur the first time.

¹One of my informants arrived in Norway at around the age of ten. I have included this person in the second-generation category.

²A further discussion of dharma follows in chapter 4

³On South Asian migration, see e.g. Tinker 1977 or Clarke et al. 1990. Further reading on problems of definition for the term diaspora, see Safran 1991. On page 83-84 he proposes a definition for “diaspora”

1.4 A Note on Spellings

Due to the practical challenges associated with type facing on the computer and for practical reasons I do not follow the common Indological convention of transcribing Sanskrit and Hindi terms. Instead, generally accepted English spellings are used for these terms, spellings which are common in non-technical literature on Hinduism. The spellings I have used are sufficient for positive identification of the Sanskrit and Hindi terms used.

1.5 Earlier Research

The Indian Hindu community in Norway is fairly small, and does not attract much attention on the public scene. This is reflected in the particularly small number of studies done on this community, both regarding socio-economic issues and religion. With a few exceptions, most scholarly work on Indian immigrants in Norway sheds little light on the issues that I discuss in the thesis. For such information this thesis therefore relies heavily on my own observations and other non-Norwegian work, particularly British.

I should note that the select bibliography in the appendix does not do justice to work that indeed has been done on other South Asian communities in Norway, notably the Pakistani community. This community is roughly five times the size of the Indian community. Much interesting work on South Asians in Norway is to be found in the form of unpublished theses.

1.6 Indians in Norway

With nearly 40.000 persons, Norway has the largest South Asian population in Scandinavia. The latest demographical data show that the Indian population numbers 5996 persons.⁴ Of these, 1957 persons are second-generation immigrants, i.e. persons born in Norway with both parents born in India. This makes Indians the third largest South Asian group in Norway, after Pakistanis (22831) and Sri Lankans (9826). Bangladeshis number a couple of hundred persons.

The migration trajectories for the largest three South Asian groups are quite different. Large numbers of Pakistanis started arriving in Norway in the 1970's, in the main as unskilled labour, helping to fill a labour force shortfall in the Norwegian economy at the time (Wist 2000:25-45). The great majority of Sri Lankans are Tamils (both Hindus and Christians) that arrived as refugees in the years following the outbreak of war in Sri Lanka in 1983 (Jacobsen 2001:90). Indians started arriving in Norway in search of work and education already from the 1960's and onwards (Jacobsen 2001:89).

⁴ Pr. January 1, 2000, Central Bureau of Statistics (Statistisk sentralbyrå – SSB). Figures are available on www.ssb.no.

Some of the informants from Fieldwork 1 told me that they arrived in Norway more or less by chance or as the result of being offered skilled work. For example, one told me he came here as a tourist in the early 1960's, and since he liked the country, he decided to stay (there was no visa requirement at the time).

Just over half of the Indians are concentrated in the central eastern part of the country, i.e. in Oslo and the adjacent counties of Akershus and Buskerud (according to 1994 SSB-statistics). The rest are settled mainly in the larger cities elsewhere in the country. The detailed statistical material⁵ prepared by historian Kristin Kolbeinstveit Wist reveals a comparatively high degree of social mobility in this community in terms of increases in levels of education, income and types of employment over given periods. Potentially this social mobility translates into a relatively high degree of integration into different aspects of Norwegian society and culture.⁶ The material from Wist also shows that Indians on average had high levels of education when they started to arrive in Norway. On the basis of the material from Wist and my own observation, it seems clear that the Indian community is typically middle-class (i.e. average income levels, strong emphasis on education and family, urban backgrounds).⁷ Julian Kramer observes from his mid 1970's fieldwork among Indians in the city of Drammen that most informants, especially the Hindus, have an urban middle-class background from India (Kramer 1979:150,151).

1.7 How many Hindus?

According to my knowledge, the religions represented among the Indians in Norway are Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, Sikhism. The Sikhs in all probability form the largest group, and the Hindus the second largest. As far as I have been able to ascertain the number of Muslims and Christians is very small.

As there are no statistics available that link national background and religious affiliation in the population of Norway, the task of assessing the number of persons belonging to the different religions is a matter of using a combination of educated guesswork and

⁵ Prepared from unprocessed statistical data files compiled by the Central Bureau of Statistics, made available to the Department of History, University of Oslo in 1999. The high resolution data enables detailed study of the trajectories of all individual first- and second generation immigrants meeting certain criteria. With the aid of an advanced statistical application called SPSS, Wist has prepared from the data a number of statistical tables covering various socio-economic indicators for Indian and Pakistani immigrants in Norway from 1970 up to 1990. See: Wist 2000.

⁶ My observations on living standards among informants differ from those recorded by Kramer in his work among Indians in Drammen 1976-77. It appears that Indians he observed had lower incomes and living standards than the informants I have observed in Oslo 25 years later (see Kramer 1980).

⁷ A note on my own observations: Fieldwork 1 informants were asked about household income in general terms (average), and occupation (mostly white collar). I also observed how people lived (average size homes) and noted the importance attached to the education of their children. On the basis of these observations, I conclude that Fieldwork 2 informants show a middle-class orientation. Without delving into the sociological niceties of the designation "middle class", I should point out that this term is usually understood very broadly in the perception of the general Norwegian public. For example, income-wise the distinction between middle class and working class has little meaning in Norwegian society.

various sources with limited information. The sources available are: My informants' own assessments based on knowledge of their own community and membership information of religious associations. The latter type of information is available from Office of the County Governor (Fylkesmann) in each county and directly from these organisations themselves. The Central Bureau of Statistics (SSB) maintains statistics on nationality and immigration. SSB also keeps track of the proper names of all individuals registered in Norway, which in some cases can be useful as a source of information about caste distribution. The computerised national telephone directory can to an extent also provide the same type of information (<http://180.uninett.no>).

Based on an evaluation of information from these sources, I estimate the number of Indian Hindus to be somewhere between one third and half of the total Indian community, between 2000 and 3000 persons. By far the greatest majority are North Indian. Fieldwork by Julian Kramer gave an indication of the proportion of Hindus and other religions among his informants in Drammen in the 1970's. More than half of the Indian population in Drammen were Sikhs, he estimated, and the rest were Hindu (Kramer 1979:147). Jacobsen puts the number of North Indian Hindus in the country as a whole at between 2000 and 2500 (Jacobsen 2001:98). It is of interest to note that many of my Fieldwork 1 informants appear to be rather well informed about the number of Indian Hindus in Norway. They are quite certain that the Sikhs form the majority of Indians. Several informants believed the number of Indian Hindus in Norway to be in the range of the very concrete number of 40 percent of the Indian community. One informant said that as far as he knew, there are "about 70 Hindu families in Oslo" (I do not know how many individuals this number would work out to be). According to several informants, Punjabis form the largest part of the Hindu community, with persons from Uttar Pradesh second. According to different sources, it appears that the Indian Hindu community in Norway is characterised by a large proportion of members of the Brahmin caste. Five out of my 12 Fieldwork 2 informants are Brahmins. Kramer mentioned that 14 out of his 41 Indian informants (from different religions) in Drammen were Brahmins (Kramer 1980:3). According to a member of the Board of the SMS temple in Slemmestad, there are "a large number" of Brahmins among the members of the temple. According to the national telephone directory, there are 122 telephone subscribers in Oslo listed under "Sharma", a name which is common among Brahmins, i.e. a little over 5% of all Indians of all religions living in Oslo.⁸

- How Many in Oslo?

According to census figures from January 1994⁹ there were 2336 persons with Indian national background living in Oslo. Out of these 2336, there were 632 persons of all age groups born

⁸ One cannot assume, however that everyone with this surname necessarily belongs to the Brahmin caste.

⁹ SSB population figures pr. Jan. 1, 1994.

in Norway of two Indian parents, that is persons who would be considered as second-generation immigrants. If we assume, based on the discussion above, that about half of them are Hindus, it means that theoretically there were 316 second-generation Indian Hindus of all age groups residing in Oslo as pr. January 1994. This number does not include persons born in India, and who have been resident in Norway since childhood. Assessing the number of these persons lies outside this discussion. It seems reasonable in any case to conclude that the number of second-generation Hindus in Oslo within the same age group as my informants must be fairly small indeed, in all probability not exceeding a couple of hundred or so persons.¹⁰

¹⁰ For further reading on the various Hindu communities of Norway, see Knut A. Jacobsen (ed) 2001: *Verdensreligioner i Norge*. pp. 87-127. The chapter by Jacobsen on Hinduism also contains information on various cultural and religious associations.

2 METHOD OF FIELDWORK

2.1 Two Fieldwork Phases

This study, as mentioned, is the outcome of two phases of fieldwork among North-Indian Hindus in Oslo. The first phase, completed in 1996, was a pilot survey conducted among 15 first-generation Hindus. The intention of the pilot survey was to gain a general insight into the Indian Hindu community. This pilot survey, hereafter referred to as Fieldwork 1, comprised formal interviews with informants, a number of informal conversations and observation of cultural and religious activities in various contexts.

The second phase of fieldwork, Fieldwork 2, consists of interviews with 12 second-generation Indian Hindu immigrants in Oslo from September 1998 to March 1999. These interviews comprise the core field data upon which the analyses and interpretations of the thesis rest. The focus of Fieldwork 2 and the theme of the thesis developed in my mind as the result of insights gained from Fieldwork 1. These insights have also been an indispensable aid in the process of understanding and evaluating the information collected from the informants of Fieldwork 2. References to Fieldwork 1 are occasionally included to supplement the discussion of the data from Fieldwork 2. Unless otherwise specified, all quotes from informants are from Fieldwork 2.

2.2 Selecting informants

Informants were selected among persons that I assessed to be well adapted into Norwegian culture. The reasoning behind this decision was based on the expectation that material from persons who have lived here for a long time would provide the most interesting evidence for any process of change in a diaspora religion. The criteria I set up for selecting informants were as follows:

- Born in Norway or completed all or most of grade school in this country. (Persons beyond their teens who had completed their entire grade school in Norway were hard to come by. I therefore also accepted as informants persons who were born in India, but who had completed most of their grade school in Norway).
- Fluency in Norwegian. (Assuming command of language as a sign of acculturation).
- Late teens and preferably early twenties. (Persons in this age group are likely to have been more exposed to host society cultural influences compared to children and younger persons. I therefore expected such cultural influences to be most visible in this age-group. Also, locating informants much above this age group is difficult since there actually are not many potential second-generation informants above their mid-twenties in Norway).
- Informants must not be related to other informants (for the sake of variety in views).
- Resident in the Oslo area. (Partly for practical reasons, and out of the consideration that since Oslo is the only metropolitan city in the country, people living in Oslo may have views and experiences different from people living elsewhere in the country).
- All of North Indian origin. (In the interest of as much cultural similarity as possible).
- Roughly equal number of men and women.

I located informants using my own network of personal acquaintances in the Indian community, or by asking informants or other contacts for referrals to people they could recommend. A few informants were located simply by introducing myself to South Asian students whom I met at the University campus. Seven out of the twelve informants are students at the University of Oslo. Since informants partly were located by referral, some informants know each other personally or by acquaintance. For these reasons the material is likely to be skewed in the direction of some similarity in socio-economic backgrounds.

2.3 Presentation of Fieldwork 2 Informants

MEN		WOMEN	
Arvind 17	High School pupil	Shanti 20	University student
Sushil 23	University student	Usha 21	University student
Vinod 23	College (“høgskole”) student	Shubra 22	College (“høgskole”) student
Tushar 24	Employee in private corporation	Vinita 22	University student
Gopal 25	University student	Kamlesh 24	Employee in private corporation
Vijay 26	University student	Kavita 25	University student

All 12 informants live, work, or study in the greater Oslo area. Most of them are students, and their average age is about 24. About half are born in Norway, the other half in India. Those born in India have lived in Norway at least since the age of ten.

Since the Indian Hindu community in Oslo is very small, I have taken care to anonymise informants. The aliases chosen bear no similarity to informants' real names, whether regarding initial letters, number of syllables or meaning. To reduce the probability of recognition I am not linking the aliases with caste and regional origin. Even to indicate general personal information relating to just two or three biographical categories - regional origin, age, caste, education, or sex - can often be enough to identify a person with certainty. I have therefore frequently omitted from the text biographical information that could lead to the identification of an informant. The only personal information I have provided is related to occupation in very general terms and age. In a couple cases I have requested special permission from informants if I felt that sensitive biographical information was necessary in the text.

Although limited, I believe the information provided gives a fairly good profile of young North-Indian Hindus in Oslo. This judgment is based on what my Fieldwork 2 informants have to tell me, information collected from Fieldwork 1 and statistical material from The Central Bureau of Statistics (Statistisk sentralbyrå - SSB).¹¹

All informants describe themselves as "Hindus". The answers varied, however, when I asked them to specify their family tradition or sectarian preference. One said "*sanatan dharm*", several said "just ordinary Hinduism" while four were able to specify family association with special traditions or sects: two said *Arya Samaj* (though not too sure about this), one said *Swami Narayan* (very sure of this), one said her family had a *Durga* tradition from "way back". All were able to name the *ishtadevas*¹² of either one or both parents, and just a few said they had no special ishtadeva of their own at the moment. Generally Brahmins were able to specify in more detail about ishtadevas than the others. Two informants had their own gurus – these were relatives in India.

Regarding caste,¹³ I have one informant from each of the following non-Brahmin castes, according to informants' own designations: *Baniya*, *Patel*, *Aurora*, *Khatri*. Five are

¹¹ As recorded in K.K. Wist 2000.

¹² Literally: "preferred god" (Sanskrit). It is common among Hindus to have a special relationship with one particular deity.

¹³ The selection of informants is not intended to reflect the actual distribution of castes in the Indian community. Even so, it appears that the Brahmin caste is probably one of the largest, as I have noted above.

Brahmin and three are *Kshatriya*.¹⁴ There are eight informants all in all with a Punjabi background, and one each with a background from Gujarat, Bengal, Maharashtra, and Uttar Pradesh.¹⁵ One informant is a high school pupil. The other eleven have on average completed three years of university-level education, with two years at the lowest and six years at the highest. Most informants have a science or technical background in their education. Nearly all informants said they had participated in religious education (RE) classes throughout all or part of grade school.¹⁶

A comparison of informants' educational backgrounds with those of their parents suggests upwards-social mobility. According to my observations, many of their parents do not have an academic background and most are employed in middle level private or public sector clerical positions. Many mothers are either working or otherwise active outside the home. According to a Board Member of the Temple Committee, who asked not to be identified, the majority of members of the temple are either employed by private companies or self-employed. The rest are employed by the National Government or local councils. He believes that most of the wives work outside the home.

Informants' homes that I visited are mostly low-rise apartments or semi-detached, typical of private homes of Oslo. Apart from the presence of pictures or objects from India, interior decoration is quite similar to what one would expect in any Norwegian home in the same income/occupation bracket. Most informants are from two-child families.

The number of visits to India can be a gauge of family economy and the strength of ties to relatives in India. Among my informants it is common to visit India once every two-three years. The highest number is ten visits since birth, and the lowest is two.

Information about relatives beyond the immediate family may tell us something about migration patterns into Norway. Only four out of twelve informants had other relatives in Norway (all paternal uncles and their families). This seems to indicate a relatively low occurrence of chain migration among my informants' families.¹⁷

¹⁴ "Kshatriya" would not normally be used as a designator of caste in North-India.

¹⁵ The selection of informants is not intended to reflect the distribution of regional origins in the total Indian community in Oslo.

¹⁶ Religious education classes (RE) forms a part of the standard public school curriculum in Norway. Since 1997 these classes are non-confessional. In the case of my now-adult informants this was not so when they were school children. This meant that pre-1997 RE teaching should be founded upon the "values of Christianity". In practice in the Oslo area, RE has long had a fairly "secular" character, although quantitatively the curriculum gave priority (and still does) to Christianity. Prior to 1997, parents who were not members of the Lutheran State Church could exempt their children from these classes, a fairly common practice among Norwegians and immigrants alike. That most informants say they participated in these classes is therefore noteworthy.

¹⁷ This observation disagrees with Kramer (1980:5, 7). He observed that chain migration was common among his informants in Drammen. This disagreement may be explained by my small sample of 12 informants

The impression one gets is of an immigrant community with a high degree of socio-economic integration in terms of income and education. The level of socio-economic integration is also reflected in the level of informants' Norwegian language skills. It would be safe to say that all display a native or near-native command of grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation. Although all conversations were conducted in Norwegian, they were often interspersed with English words and terms. English terms were especially used when talking about religious tenets they had learned about in India, or from a non-Norwegian speaking person. This indicates a lack of command of a Norwegian terminology suitable for describing aspects of Hindu religious experience. Occasionally I had the impression that informants had difficulties expressing theoretical/abstract concepts related to religion when I questioned them about more than simple facts. The two informants with a liberal arts background seemed better able to express abstract concepts in Norwegian. Though all informants could speak the language of their parents quite fluently, only about half were able to read the *devanagari* script. Of these, only a handful said they could actually write devanagari to an extent. Four informants gave credit for their literacy skills in Indian languages to mother tongue training offered in school. Vinita says:

I had Hindi lessons for two years at school, in grades four and five, and was exempted from Norwegian class for those lessons. I had a really talented Hindi teacher who taught me what I know now. When that option was discontinued it affected me a lot, because I was now denied the possibility to learn more language – which is the key to understanding. This is why my vocabulary and understanding [of Hindi/Indian culture] hasn't been good enough.

Compared with their parents and the older generation, participation in organised Indian cultural and religious activities is quite low among second-generation Hindus. Two informants said they had never been to the local temple. Most said they went there once a year or so accompanied by their parents, and only two informants had visited the temple to any regular extent.

Most informants maintain wide social contact with Norwegians, and several describe these relationships as very close. This may be seen as an indicator of a high level of exposure to Norwegian culture and society. Hardly any experiences of racism or ethnic discrimination are reported in the material. Except for one informant who is married to a Norwegian and one

compared to Kramer's 41. At the time of Kramer's fieldwork there were approx. 1200 Indians resident in Norway, compared to about five times that number today.

who lives unmarried with a Norwegian partner, none of the informants said they had any boyfriend or girlfriend. Five were living at home with their parents, the oldest one aged 25.

Young Hindus give the impression of leading fairly temperate lives. Only two informants said they smoke regularly, though a few said they might have a cigarette or two at parties. The same two who smoked said they also used alcohol regularly. Others said they might have a glass now and then, depending on the circumstances. A few said they never touched alcohol. Smoking and drinking is rarer among girls than boys.

2.4 Meeting My Informants

I found my informants to be friendly and thoughtful, eager to help and explain. I encountered a lot more openness than I would have expected as a complete stranger to most, and was shown a lot of trust when told about family affairs and personal matters. Some gave suggestions about whom to talk to, what to ask, and valuable ideas about points I could raise in the thesis. Now and then I subjectively sensed that female informants felt a certain wariness against me in my capacity as an unfamiliar, unmarried male requesting a private conversation. But as the interview session progressed this feeling seemed to disappear. One young man first had to consult his parents before he could agree to be interviewed. He returned my call a couple of days later and politely explained that he was unable to give an interview because he needed to concentrate on his studies, presumably upon parental advice. The high priority given to studies frequently excluded the possibility of making appointments for interviews at short notice. This seemed to predominate among the girls, who often gave an impression of leading highly scheduled lives. This despite their being full-time students and not working part-time, as is very common otherwise among students in Norway.

To locate informants and set up appointments was often a time-consuming activity. Many meetings could only be arranged up to several weeks after the first contact. After a few interviews the impression soon formed that belonging to a small immigrant community poses a special challenge to young people in the process of building an adult identity in a society completely different from what their parents had experienced. All informants are active participants in Norwegian society, and seem to participate on an equal footing with Norwegians in competition for education and good jobs. The people I met underscore reports of Indian immigrants in other Western countries as achievement-oriented and highly

concerned with economic and social adaptation to their host country. At the same time colour¹⁸ persists as a reminder of differences in cultural and religious heritage.

What does it mean to be a Hindu in a society where everything is so different from India? The field material tells of persons searching and sometimes struggling to find out what it means to be a Hindu, an Indian, and at the same time a Norwegian. We find evidence of a search for new ways of demarcating, defining and understanding their culture and religious tradition: an example of redefinition and reinterpretation of identity in-the-making. Indeed I did encounter apparent uncertainty about things that I asked about. At times it seemed like the very process of being questioned provoked renewed thinking on what Hinduism is.

2.5 Conducting the Interviews

The 12 informants of my Fieldwork 2 material were interviewed in sessions lasting from less than an hour to 4-5 hours. Some interviews were taken over two or more sessions. 10 of the interviews were tape-recorded, and all interviews were transcribed in full. All conversations were in Norwegian, as this is the language informants know best. Most interviews took place at convenient locations in the city, such as a cafe. Interviews were also conducted at home, sometimes in informants' own rooms and sometimes in the kitchen or the living room. Although parents were able to listen in if they wanted to, they generally kept a discreet distance during the interviews, also in cases when I was talking to female informants. Once in a while I invited parents to join in the conversation. As far as I can tell in the case of the people I met, it would hardly have made any difference to the content of the interviews whether the parents were present or not. I should mention that I noticed one specific case where it may have made a difference. Against my better judgment I asked one of my female informants if she had a boy friend. This produced a loud silence, which I am sure was for the benefit of her mother, who happened to be within earshot.

Informants were in advance notified that the interview was not meant to be a knowledge test of Hinduism, nor a fact-finding mission on the teachings of Hinduism. Several in fact expressed concern about this because, as they explained, they didn't know much about Hinduism. I often sensed a feeling of relief and surprise when I explained that instead, my interest was in getting to know their personal thoughts and reflections on religion and their experience of being Hindus in Norway. They were informed in writing that I would observe

¹⁸ Three informants mentioned black hair as a sign of being foreign and different. Only one mentioned skin color in this context.

strict confidentiality and abide by the guidelines for safekeeping of fieldwork material as laid down by Norsk Samfunnsvitenskapelig Datatjeneste.¹⁹

- Interview Guide

An interview guide (see appendix) was prepared and was revised as the fieldwork progressed. Questions relating to doctrine were more or less omitted, although such themes were discussed whenever they naturally arose. I asked about their thoughts, their feelings, values and beliefs, all the while revolving around the themes of Hinduism, their experience of being in a minority and about migration. More specifically I asked for their thoughts on Christianity, the experience of explaining Hinduism to others, what Hinduism means to them, how they learned about Hinduism (note: not *what* they have learned), about rituals, their relationship to God, participation in organised activities, etc. Sometimes after I had asked a question, I returned to it later and rephrased it. This technique often unearthed additional information and perspectives on the subject, and sometimes it revealed possible uncertainties and ambiguities if the new reply didn't dovetail with the earlier one.

As I gained experience in interviewing I felt that I had less need for the interview guide. Eventually I tended to set it aside as the interviews gradually took on the form of a loosely structured conversation rather than a question-and-answer session. These interviews were the most successful and informative. As far as possible informants were allowed to follow their own lines of thought, which I then followed up. Obviously, there were many interesting that issues could not be pursued.

A result of the loose structure of the interviews is that a substantial part of the information is found not in the form of direct, considered responses to direct questions. Rather, a lot of relevant information is in the form of incidental information not related to the immediate question, but often to some other contextually related issue. I believe that this method enhances the credibility of the material. Since much information was volunteered casually it reflects informants' intuitive thoughts to some extent. But since informants' answers are not nicely ordered by themes, the work of analysis became a painstaking process. When reading the thesis it is important to remember that the answers recorded are a glimpse into someone's thoughts at a particular point in time. An opinion expressed then may not be the same today. One must also keep in mind that this fieldwork was done not with the aim of producing statistics. The reader must take care to remind himself that whatever general

¹⁹ The Norwegian Social Science Data Service, headquartered at the University of Bergen, a national resource centre that provides data access and various services to the research community..

propositions I present are not applicable to the whole of the Indian Hindu community in Norway, or elsewhere. In the final analysis this is the story of 12 individuals and their personal experience of religion.

- My Role As Interviewer

An account of how I did the interviews is not complete without some remarks on my own role in the process. I am a Norwegian-Indian, but I speak neither Hindi nor Punjabi (languages that my informants are familiar with). Although I would easily pass as a Norwegian by look, my name is just about as Indian as they come. I am sure many must have been surprised to see my face after we had made appointments by phone!

An indication of how informants felt about being interviewed may lie in their reactions to a question I always made a point of asking after the interview was finished. I wanted to know how they felt about being asked all sorts of questions about their lives and their experience of religion. Most said that they enjoyed talking to someone who was interested, especially since they were not being put to a knowledge test or forced to defend anything. Some also said that this was the first time they had really had the chance to talk like this about their thoughts and feelings about Hinduism and religion.

At times I felt that my Indian name and Norwegian face put me in a slightly curious situation. For instance, informants often took special care to explain the meaning of terms and concepts that they assumed I would be unfamiliar with. But at other times, as we talked, I noticed how informants tacitly assumed I was informed about other terms and concepts which were often used quite matter-of-factly. In a non-definable way, I felt I was treated both as an insider and as an outsider. I suppose I made use of this asset to an extent by appealing to both sides of a double set of identity felt by my informants, a simultaneous sense of belonging to “We Indians” and “We Norwegians”. The reader may be able to sense that the interviews are replete with much code-switching.

I am inclined to think that my Indian family background enabled me to pick up pieces of informal and implied information that perhaps others may have missed in a similar situation. At times I also felt that people offered me certain types of information they may have hesitated to share with a Norwegian researcher. This is a purely subjective assessment, of course, but I tend to believe that some of the information that surfaces especially in chapter 6 (“Who Can Be a Hindu?”) is an example.

I have noted how I was met with a great deal of trust and openness about many personal matters. Perhaps some of this trust came about due to my “insider” background, but

then again, maybe it was the other way round? We turn next to a discussion of my method of analysis and interpretation.

3 METHOD OF INTERPRETATION AND ANALYSIS

3.1 Introduction

In the following I present my framework for interpretation of the field data and the details of my method of textual analysis. As I explained in the beginning of chapter 1, the interpretation and analysis of the field data is based on the premise that dharma serves as a framework for how many Hindus think about, i.e. conceptualise, religion. This chapter shows how I have built this understanding of dharma into my method of investigating what the field data can reveal about informants' conceptualisations of religion. The chapter concludes with some remarks on the hermeneutics involved in interpretation and analysis of the field data.

3.2 Presentation of Interpretational Framework

The fieldwork interviews were carried out with a view to understand informants' conceptualisations of religion. Preliminary analysis of the interviews revealed five recurring, broad themes that are relevant to this agenda. These five broad themes are:

- Sociological orientation - i.e. the relationship between the individual and the collective among Hindus.
- Applicability of Hinduism - i.e. whether non-Hindus can convert to Hinduism.
- Degrees of differentiation - i.e. views on the relationship between different categories, such as religion and culture, religion and tradition.
- Strategies of legitimisation - i.e. how the tenets and practices of Hinduism are explained and justified.
- The status of meaning - i.e. how important is meaning, as opposed to praxis, in informants' experience of religion?

After further analysis I discovered that the dominant trend in each of these five themes agrees very closely with various notions and assumptions found in the Hindu concept of dharma, the point of departure for interpretation and analysis. Under each theme I also discovered another and divergent trend, where informants express views that disagree with the same notions in the concept of dharma. In many of the Fieldwork 2 interviews it is clear that informants do not share these views of their parents, who are first-generation immigrants. Also, comparison between Fieldwork 1 and Fieldwork 2 to an extent indicates that disagreement with dharma is more common among second-generation informants than first-generation informants. I therefore interpret the trend of disagreement with dharma as a sign of change in the conceptualisation of Hinduism among informants. This conclusion is based on the premise that dharma is an underlying conceptual framework in Hinduism. This point is argued in the next chapter, where I discuss dharma in greater detail.

A set of five dichotomies thus emerges, each one corresponding to one of the five themes of analysis, and which can be summed up in the following general formula:

Agreement with dharma vs. Disagreement with dharma

Analysis of the field data consists in identifying and discussing dichotomies in the field data that correspond to each of the five themes of analysis.

It is important to note that informants do not relate their experience of and views about Hinduism to dharma. In fact, they never use the term when they discuss what they do or believe. Regardless if informants' views agree or disagree with dharma, however, the notions and assumptions of dharma ever seem to hover in the background. Indeed, I believe my analysis quite clearly shows that there is a relationship between the various trends that I describe from the field data and various notions in dharma. For these reasons dharma figures as a centre of gravity (to borrow a phrase from Timothy Fitzgerald 1990) in my discussions of the field data."

In an attempt to bring our understanding of the divergent trends a step further than a mere description of them as "disagreement with dharma", I discuss if they can be the result of influence from host society values and notions about religion. We can get some answers by setting the divergent trends against some features of Western religion - under the assumption that many of the values and notions of the Norwegian host society are coloured by these features. In my interpretation the divergent trends can be understood as instances of features

in Western religion. The interpretational framework can then be summed up in the following dichotomy:

Agreement with dharma vs. Agreement with Western religion

A complete outline of the interpretational framework that I follow is presented in table 1 below. The reader will occasionally note in the chapters of Part 2 that I sometimes use “Protestantism” instead of, as expected, “Western religion”. My justification for doing so is that Protestantism historically has exercised, and still does, a considerable influence on people’s thinking about religion in Norway. My understanding and usage of “Protestantism” and “Western Religion” is mainly based on W.C. Smith (1978), who writes about the historical development of Western conceptualisations of religion.

I should also note that to an extent I discuss whether conceptual changes can be seen as an expression of ideas that already exist within the Hindu tradition.

Table 1: Outline of interpretational framework.

A. General theme of analysis	B. Name of the analysis chapter where the theme is treated	C. Aspects of dharma	D. Complementary aspects of Western religion
Sociological orientation	We Hindus and I	Emphasis on the collective	Emphasis on the individual
Applicability	Who can be a Hindu?	Particularism	Universalism
Degrees of differentiation	Apart from Religion	Low differentiation between categories	High differentiation between categories
Strategies of legitimation	Reason to Believe	Authority	Rationalism
The status of meaning	To Believe Or To Do?	Praxis	Meaning

Column A names the general theme of analysis. Column B shows the names of each of the chapters where the general themes are treated. Column C lists five characteristics of dharma. Column D lists five characteristics of Western religion that complement each of the characteristics of dharma. Combined, columns C and D represent a set of five dichotomies.

- Remarks on Dharma

Each of the chapters of analysis discusses developments and conceptual changes in informants’ thoughts on religion, and relates these to the concept of dharma; hence the title of the thesis. Since I accord such importance to dharma, a detailed discussion of the concept of dharma is included in the next chapter, ”Dharma and Western religion”. But as an aid to the

reader, I include here some very brief remarks on dharma, together with some examples of how it affects the way Hindus conceptualise religion. The examples are related to column C in the table above.

Dharma is commonly translated as “religion” in general usage and textbooks. Unfortunately this simple translation of the Sanskrit term obscures the complexity of a concept that is an integral part of Hinduism to such an extent that the two can hardly be separated. (I discuss this point in the next chapter). Indian languages have no words equivalent to the word “religion” of Western languages (Halbfass 1988: 310). The concept of dharma has several layers of meaning and connotations, with references to categories as different as for example the animal world, human life and society, and cosmology (see Halbfass 1988:312). Below are some examples of how the concept of dharma is realised within the context of the five characteristics that are listed in column C of the table above:

- Collective orientation: In terms of its sociological dimension, dharma is mainly oriented towards the collective. For example, the rights and obligations of the individual are seen in terms of the customs of the group that the individual belongs to.
- Particularism: A feature in (especially older) notions of dharma is that dharma is seen to have applicability only to those who have dharma. The meaning of this is realised in a common view among Hindus that only those who are born of Hindu parents can be Hindus.
- Low differentiation: The same principle of dharma governs and upholds the processes of e.g. the natural world and society, as well as different processes and spheres of activity within these categories. Legal matters and ritual matters may be seen as not fundamentally different, for example. In field data we can see that ritual and daily activities often blend, a feature I interpret as an indication of how features of dharma inform the lives of many informants.
- Authority: Strategies of legitimisation in dharma are based on authority, such as a respected elder, or a venerable tradition. In the field material we can observe how many informants use a similar approach in the way they refer to parents, family or tradition to justify various beliefs and practices. There are also examples of how, when informants raise questions about a particular practice or belief, these questions may be met by parents with a description of what is considered the customarily established practice, which in turn serves as a norm and prescription

for the same practice. I later use the term “prescription-description” to describe this type of legitimisation strategy, since it seems to fit better with the field data.

- Praxis: Dharma is primarily oriented towards praxis. This means that in matters that relate to religion, for example, the observance of the prescribed rituals is felt to be meaningful in itself – what counts is what you do. In my field data we can see that many young informants equate religiosity with the performance of rituals and religious customs.

- Remarks on Western Religion:

In the following I illustrate the aspects of Western religion listed in column D of the table above. (Just as with dharma, I discuss Western religion in some more detail in the next chapter).

- Orientation towards the individual: Religion is to a large extent seen as a matter of personal choice, often connected with an emphasis on individual piety and commitment.
- Universalism: One of the ways in which universalism is realised in Western religion is found in a notion that Christianity is available to all regardless of background, e.g. in language, nationality, culture etc.
- High differentiation: Various categories, such as society, physics, God and Man are seen to be different in essence, that is, they are regulated by different principles. For example, matters relating to religion and to public administration are seen to be fundamentally different in nature.
- Rationalism: The validity of concepts, notions and practices are seen to be dependent upon their justification within an intellectual, rationalistic framework. Unless various notions and practice in religion can be explained within, or at least related to a framework like this, such notions and practices are seen to have a diminished relevance.
- Meaning: A characteristic of Western religion is that emphasis is placed on understandings and personal conviction. As a consequence of this, we find in the context of much Western religion the notion that belief can be expressed as doctrine. An example of this is how many churches put their young through the ordeal of Confirmation or Baptism classes, where the idea is to impart a correct

understanding of the doctrine of the Church. Closely connected with the emphasis on understandings, especially common in some Protestant traditions, is a notion that ritual is a practical and symbolic expression of a (religious) concept, and that ritual has little meaning in itself. Later (in the chapter “To Believe Or To Do?”).

If we, for heuristical purposes, set dharma and Western religion against each other, we can in ideal-typical terms say that one of the ways in which dharma affects the way Hindus conceptualise religion is that Hindus tend to think of religion as something you do, and something you share socially. This is where the orientation in dharma towards praxis and the collective shows up. To a Protestant in Norway, on the other hand, religion is a matter of personal conviction and belief, which makes it into something you choose for yourself, and potentially, something that can be argued and shared with others intellectually. This type of religion is thus characterised by a degree of emphasis on ideology and a rationalistic approach to legitimisation.

- The Difference Lies in Conceptualisation

Cutting short any further attempts at simplified illustrations, I would like to argue that an important and underlying difference between Hindu and Western religions does not primarily lie on the plane of differences in ritual practices and points of doctrine, but in how religion is conceptualised in people's minds. Indeed, Hindu and Western religion is structured and conceptualised so differently that one could be justified in arguing that they should not be included under the same terminological category of “religion”. The consequences of this proposition will not be pursued here, however. In any case I emphasise that one of the main premises of this thesis is that an insight into various aspects of the concept of dharma is a necessity to understand some of the differences between Hindu and Western concepts of religion, and to interpret what it means when these differences show up as sometimes competing concepts in the field data.

3.3 Method of Textual Analysis

A close reading of the interviews reveals a large number of topics treated. Some topics occur in one interview only, while other topics recur through most interviews, but with unequal coverage. A cross-comparison of all informants with more or less equal weight on all topics is therefore not possible.

I identified some 15 or so different topics that were fairly widely distributed in the interviews and that I deemed worthy of closer examination and analysis. Under each of these topics I classified statements from the interviews according to their immediate subject matter. Some examples of different topics are: learning about Hinduism, passing on tradition, identity, attitudes to Christians, other religions, personal prayer, ritual observances, participation in organised activities, marriage, ideas about God, relationship with Norwegians, explanations of doctrines, criticisms against Hinduism, and doubts.

During the process of extracting and sorting statements according to topic, I noticed that statements sorted under one topic might have something in common with statements sorted under another topic. I also discovered that sometimes, if I combined different topics together, that the combination in turn suggested new general topics on a more abstract level of analysis. These general topics were often different from the immediate reference of each of the individual statements or topics that I had arranged into a topic combination. Needless to say, the amount of data in such a topic combination was also considerably larger than under each component topic. The scope of the field material made it possible to construct five such topic combinations, each of them internally coherent in terms of their general theme. Data that did not fit thematically into these five topic combinations was set aside as surplus.

The analysis and interpretation of the interviews is based on the data of the five topic combinations. The general theme of each topic combination also defines the horizon for each of the five chapters of analysis in Part 2 of the thesis. Analysis thus becomes a matter of investigating what the individual statements can tell me about the general theme of each topic combination that they belong to. “Close dialogue” seems an apt description of the relationship between the many voices in the text of the data and myself.

It is at this stage of analysis that my interpretational framework is activated. The general themes of the five topic combinations, the five corresponding aspects of dharma that I introduced above, and their corresponding complementary aspects in Western religion are combined into an analytical matrix. This matrix is my guideline for identifying, selecting and interpreting the data.

An example of how I have arranged one such topic combination shows how the analysis was done. The chapter named “Reason to Believe” is based on data from the topic combination with the general theme “Strategies of legitimisation”. This topic combination consists, among others, of the following inter-related topics:

- Passing on the tradition – how is this done?
- Sources of knowledge on Hinduism (parents, books, teachers etc).
- How are the tenets of Hinduism legitimised?
- Arguments, views etc. in favour of or against Hinduism.

These individual topics were arranged into the one topic combination because I found that they all had something to say about methods and strategies of legitimisation. This arrangement is also guided by my understanding of dharma, where dharma among its various features is characterised by a particular strategy of legitimisation. This legitimisation strategy is one area where dharma and Western religion often differ. By exploring what informants have to say about how and why they believe in certain things, we can detect signs of tension between different and even competing strategies for legitimisation and, also, traces of change.

Returning briefly to how I constructed the topic combinations, I would like to point out that different statements apparently relating to just one topic might on closer inspection be seen to relate to more than one topic. It would then be possible to include the same statement under more than one topic, and in different topic combinations too. For instance, while speaking on the topic of family, an informant might simultaneously be saying that only persons from Hindu families can be Hindus, that Hindu religious practice is primarily a family matter, or that family tradition is the benchmark for correct practice and belief. In some cases I have used overlapping elements from the same statement to illuminate different subjects, as the reader at times may notice in my discussion of the field data.

3.4 Remarks on Hermeneutics

From the above discussion we can see that interpretation is the name of the game – played according to a defined set of rules, the analytical matrix which I have devised. This matrix is actually a hermeneutical structure that points to the data which is relevant for analysis, the kind of meanings that I am able to identify in the data, the interpretations that are available to me, and ultimately the conclusions I draw. The analytical matrix, or hermeneutical structure, is ultimately an aid to developing my narrative with as few loose ends in the final product as possible.

This hermeneutical structure can be likened to a “meaning-generator”. The output from the generator is the result of a complex multi-directional flow between the various components within the generator. Following this image, the components of the meaning-

generator are a particular understanding of dharma and Western religion, what the informants actually say, what I think they say according to my text, and the five thematically defined topic combinations that I constructed from the text.

Output is not, however, solely determined by the components inside the “generator”. The quality of the textual input – the field material – is an equally important determinant for the kind of meaning that is generated. This quality is determined by a number of factors, ranging from all kinds of informal considerations such as the atmosphere during the interview, to formal considerations such as how informants are selected and the precision of the transcripts from the tapes. It is also well to keep in mind that not everything in human interaction is determined by the type of structures and patterns that a researcher can describe and sometimes also devises (for example the set of five dichotomies that I use). My system of textual analysis and interpretation may therefore lead to some underestimation of the role of informants’ personal inclination on various matters that I ask them about. Sociologist Pål Repstad points to the consideration that in the context of an interview about religion, some informants who have not given much thought to religion otherwise might exaggerate the role of religion in their lives (Repstad 1984:35).

The text of each interview is also the outcome of a great deal of analysis that actually occurs simultaneously with the collection of the data. An example of such on-site analysis is when I continuously evaluate the answers that I get during an interview; decide which issues to follow up, and which to leave. This pre-analysis is therefore another component that determines output, although it is located outside my “meaning generator”. In this perspective the separation between the activity of collecting data and the activity of analysis is somewhat artificial. The relationship between analysis and interpretation of the field data is also not so clear-cut as might be imagined. This is because the method of analysis selected is in fact the outcome of number of assumptions and pre-judgements that in their own right form part of an often unconscious process of interpretation. Analysis and interpretation are thus two aspects of the same process, which I believe is reflected in the exposition of my own methods in this chapter.

An important parameter of the textual input is its size: I quickly discovered that analysis was complicated by the fairly large volume of my field data, which in turn involved a greater risk of error in identifying trends. This depends, of course, on the technique of analysis used. A large volume of data can nevertheless make for some ambiguity when analysis reveals different and divergent trends in the same themes. There is therefore always

the danger that the researcher makes himself guilty of a degree of essentialisation if he inadvertently singles out a particular trend to suit his agenda.

The significance of the person of the researcher, i.e. myself, in the hermeneutical cycle must be taken into account. I described above how I felt that my Indian background was an asset in my contact with informants. I also have a Norwegian background, with a childhood steeped in conservative Protestant values and notions. For this reason many generalisations about Norwegians and Protestantism may unwittingly be blended with my own personal memories and subjective assessments of the nature of these values. As a precaution against the effects of personal background on analysis and interpretation, I performed small “reality checks”, using fellow students as resource. Notions that I had about what is “typical”, “common” etc. among Norwegians, were checked by testing them against the impressions that fellow students might have about the same subject.

The reader will frequently notice how I use expressions like “it seems probable, in my judgement, apparently” and so forth. The use of such expressions is a natural part of qualitative analysis, where it often is not possible to draw definite conclusions as opposed to in quantitative contexts, such as a statistical study or a natural science. But then the object of a qualitative study is often to describe and generate “meanings”, a quantity which in itself is non-quantifiable, in contrast with a description of “facts”, as the more positivistic methodologies claim to do. The findings of a qualitative study cannot therefore be said to represent an objective “truth”. As the results of a qualitative study are closely connected to the hermeneutical premises of the individual researcher, the researcher is not interchangeable. It follows that some of the conclusions I draw are potentially different from what another researcher working on the same problem might arrive at.

In a final note on textual analysis, I must stress that the judgments and assessments of what informants say are based not only on the formal contents of the written transcript of an interview, but also the nuances expressed by inflections of voice, the pauses suggesting uncertainty, a laugh, a facial expression, not to speak of words exchanged before or after an interview. All of these convey information that the written text of a transcript cannot, the meaning of which I am the sole judge.

4 DHARMA AND WESTERN RELIGION

4.1 Introduction

This chapter is divided into two parts, I and II. Part I presents the concept of dharma in some detail, and Part II discusses concepts of religion in the Western world. Apart from these presentations, the purpose of the chapter is to show how dharma and Western concepts of religion differ from each other, and at the same time show how their apparent similarities can lead to distortion in the interpretation of developments in diaspora Hinduism.

PART I

4.2 What is Dharma?

This section introduces my presentation of the concept of dharma and its multi-layered referential universe.

Hindus often call their own religion “sanatan dharm” - usually translated as “the eternal tradition”. In an Indian context today, different religions may be referred to as different “dharma”. In translation between Western and Indian languages the terms are generally treated as equivalent (Weightman and Pandey 1978:224, Halbfass 1988: 310). This fairly straightforward explanation conceals a wealth of meanings and connotations contained in dharma.

It should be noted that a discussion of dharma should properly distinguish between its different features in the Hindu, Jain and Buddhist traditions. A fuller discussion of dharma

might also include a treatment of particular aspects of usage in different contexts, e.g. ritual, metaphysics, social conduct, xenology, jurisprudence, kingship, etc., as well as changes in meaning over time. These aspects will not be included in this general presentation of dharma.

I begin my presentation by looking at some occurrences of dharma in the Bhagavadgita and how they have been rendered in different English translations.

4.3 Examples of Translation from The Bhagavadgita

We can take the Bhagavadgita, a well-known Hindu sacred text, to illustrate some of the difficulties of translating dharma into a Western language. A survey of the roughly 40 occurrences of the stem “dharma-” in the Sanskrit text and its rendering in different English versions reveals many different renditions of the same word, e. g. “Law, Religion, Duty, Righteousness, Right tradition” and others. The second line of the first verse in the Bhagavadgita is a good example of variations in translation, where different versions translate the Sanskrit original “*dharmakshetre-kurukshetre*” in different ways. Johnson in his translation gives this: “in the Field of the Law, the Kuru’s Field”.²⁰ Prabhupada²¹ has it: “in the place of pilgrimage at Kuruksetra”, with a note added that explains “a place where religious rituals are performed”. Bolle suggests: “in the land of the right tradition, the land of the Kurus”.²² In chapter 1, verse 40 the compound *kuladharmā*²³ is translated by Bolle as “the eternal family tradition”, and by Edgerton as “the immemorial holy laws”.²⁴ Within one and the same translation the compound *svadharma*²⁵ is rendered in different places as “the principles of religion” (4.8) and “one’s own occupation” (18.47).²⁶ The frequently occurring antonym *adharma* is rendered in different translations as e.g. “Irreligion, Chaos, Wrong, Confusion”.

The many variations in translation reflect the difficulties of translating dharma into Western languages. The complexity of the term is also revealed in the history of Indology.

²⁰W. J. Johnson (transl.) 1994.

²¹Prabhupada (trans.) 1989.

²²Bolle, K.W. 1979

²³kula = family, clan

²⁴Edgerton, F. 1994

²⁵sva- = (adj.) self, one’s own

²⁶Prabhupada (trans.) 1989

4.4 Deciphering Dharma

It took a few generations for Western scholarship to tease out the broader content and implications of “dharma”.²⁷ An important difficulty was that there are no terms synonymous to the Western term and concept “religion” in Indian languages, and vice versa for Dharma.

The earliest attempt to translate dharma into a Western language appears in a Greek-Aramaic Ashokan inscription in Kandahar (third century B.C), and is there translated as *evsebeia* (“piety”, “reverence towards gods or elders”) (Halbfass 1988:550, n. 20).

The word dharma was for the first time translated into English by Charles Wilkins in his 1785 translation of the Bhagavadgita. His “Bhagvat-Geeta” was the first translation directly from Sanskrit into a Modern Western European language, and represents also the first Indian classical text available to a mass audience in Europe (Wilkins (1785) 1959:27, 32). In the first occurrence of the word dharma in verse 1 of the Sanskrit text, Wilkins simply omits it from his translation. In the next couple of occurrences he renders it as “virtue, duty”. Otherwise he repeatedly uses the word “religion”. About his rendition “by the dictates of my duty” (ch. 2, v. 7), he explains in his *notes*: “The duty of a soldier, in opposition to the dictates of the general moral duties” (p. 140). This is the only place where Wilkins comments on dharma.

In 1844 the French indologist Eugène Bournouf translated the term as “La Loi”, according to Carter one of the most common renditions in Western languages (Carter 1978: 4). Incidentally, Sanskrit does not have a term corresponding to “Law” as it would be understood e.g. in English, in the sense of a group of “rules which govern men actually and imperatively in a given locality and period of time.”²⁸ Referring to the closely related Buddhist concept of *dhamma*, one scholar some fifty years later observed that the problem of translating the term is that it expresses a different philosophy for which English did not have a proper term.²⁹ At the beginning of this century a German scholar concluded that the problem was not a want of vocabulary in English, but the lack of a corresponding notion to dharma/dhamma in Western thought in general, and suggested that the content of dharma reflected a convergence of natural and moral law.³⁰

In the mid-20th century Edgerton stated, in agreement with the general consensus on the term today: “Dharma is propriety, socially approved conduct, in relation to one’s fellow

²⁷Carter 1978: 3-53

²⁸Lingat 1973: xii

²⁹This was H. C. Warren in 1896; Carter 1978: 6

³⁰H. Beckh in about 1916 (Carter 1978: 9).

men or to other living beings (animals, or superhuman powers). Law, social usage, morality, and most of what we ordinarily mean by religion, all fall under this head [i.e. dharma].”³¹

This crossover, or overlap, in dharma between different spheres of life is a challenge to a translator, since there is no equivalent terminology for dharma in modern Western languages, and vice versa for “religion” in Indic languages.³² And yet the challenge extends beyond problems of translation, in that the term is a vehicle for an ontology entirely without a corresponding conceptual paradigm in Western culture and language. An understanding of dharma is thus a useful analytical tool in grasping how the conceptualisation of religion among informants differs from modern Western conceptualisations of religion.

4.5 Meanings of Dharma

In the following I examine the meanings of dharma in Sanskrit and Modern Hindi. The most general and basic meaning of the term is found in its Sanskrit root *dhr-*, which signifies “holding, supporting, maintaining”, a similar sense of which is found in one of its connected stems, *dharaa-*, “the earth”. As a curiosity it seems worth mentioning that the idea of “support” contained in the Vedic *dharman* is found again in the etymologically related Assamese *dhaam*, signifying a “a big cross beam supporting a platform”.³³ In Sanskrit it occurs in a very large number of compounds, for example *dharma-karman*, “virtuous action”, or “action according to dharma”. A survey of classical treatises and commentaries also reveals a variation in usage and meaning.³⁴

The Monier-Williams Sanskrit dictionary (1899) supplies a wide range of meanings and examples of usages of dharma in classical Sanskrit. The following citation comprises the most important meanings that Monier-Williams supplies in the entry for dharma:

[T]hat which is established or firm, steadfast decree, statute, ordinance, law; usage, practice, customary observance or prescribed conduct, duty; right, justice (often as synonym of punishment); virtue, morality, religion, religious merit, good works;

³¹Edgerton 1942:151-156

³²Halbfass 1988: 310, Flood:52, Klostermaier 1994:49, Larson 1995: 82. It seems worth noting that the notion that Indian languages wholly lack a word corresponding to “religion” may be somewhat imprecise. B.K. Smith (1987: 34), W.C. Smith (1964:56), Halbfass (1988: 340), Klostermaier (1994:49) give examples of other words that may seen as analogies, e.g. *marga*, *sampradaya* and others in the North and South Indian traditions. This point is for the most part mentioned in footnotes only, and not elaborated by these writers. Gavin Flood (1999:45-46) gives examples of several Sanskrit terms that have some semantic overlap with English “religion”.

³³Turner 1966: 386; Entry no. 6757.

³⁴Halbfass 1988: 324-32, 336. Lingat notes internal variation in meaning in Manu, a work with an otherwise consistent style (p. 3).

(*dharmena* or [with] *mat*, ind. according to right or rule, rightly, justly, according to the nature of anything)...; nature, character, peculiar condition or essential quality, property, mark, peculiarity....” [diacritical marks omitted].

The scope of meanings and examples of usage supplied in the newer MacDonnell Practical Sanskrit Dictionary (1958) is slightly narrower. I quote the entry for dharma in full:

“Established order, usage, institution, custom, prescription; rule; duty; virtue, moral merit, good works; right; justice; law (concerning, [genitive or at the end of a compound]) *often personified, esp. as Yama, judge of the dead, and as a Pragapati*; nature, character, essential quality, characteristic attribute, property: *in. dharmena*, in accordance with law, custom, or duty, as is *or* was right; [at the end of a compound], after the manner of, in accordance with; **dharme sthita**, observing the law, true to one’s duty” [diacritical marks omitted].

Both dictionaries offer primary meanings that refer to institutions, i.e. rules and precepts of various kinds. We also note that religion is not given as a primary meaning in Monier-Williams, and in MacDonnell religion is not supplied as a meaning at all. An interesting aspect of meaning which is supplied by both dictionaries is the reference to attribute, property, etc.

In a standard reference dictionary (McGregor 1995) on modern Hindi, our term is listed as *dharm*, and marked as a loanword from Sanskrit. One of the primary meanings supplied is: “That which is to be held or kept: the complex of religious and social obligations which a devout Hindu is required to fulfill.” The secondary meaning is listed as “customary observances of community or sect &c.” The entry for dharma also supplies other meanings, ranging across “religion, justice, custom, duty, nature, caste”. According to the entry in McGregor, the word occurs in Hindi both as a noun and also as an adjectival modifier in many compound nouns with a variety of meanings. One English-Hindi dictionary defines the English key-word “religion” as “any system of faith and worship”, and translates it into Hindi as “dharm”. The key-word “religious” is translated into the Hindi adjective “dharmik” (Raker, Joseph W. and Rama Shankar Shukla 1995).

Weightman and Pandey assert that although the Hindi *dham* has nearly identical usage to that of the English word ‘religion’, the central semantic field from where its various meanings are derived is retained from the Sanskrit meaning of inherent property or mode of

behaviour. Its reference in modern Hindi can be to persons and inanimate objects (Weightman and Pandey 1978:223, 227).

When I asked informants about the meaning of dharma, or “*dharam*”, in the pronunciation of most informants, they supplied many meanings corresponding to those given by McGregor, with an emphasis on religion, duty, vocation. It is interesting in this context to note how, in chapter 8, informants’ usage and understanding of the words “religion” and “religious” correspond to many meanings of dharma that I discuss here.

Examining “dharma” on the levels of etymology, lexicology and usage, we discover the contours of a term that in translation refracts into a wide spectrum of meanings. These are meanings which Western languages generally would assign to discrete categories of thought.

4.6 Some Ramifications of Dharma

It is clear that dharma has a vast range of references and connotations. The term dharma occurs throughout the texts of the Indian tradition, and is used in “a bewildering variety of ways” (Halbfass 1988: 312). O’Flaherty sums it up nicely in this seemingly exasperated statement: “...[N]o one is quite sure what *dharmā* is” (O’Flaherty and Derrett 1978:xiv). In the following I will nevertheless make an attempt at introducing the reader to some of the ramifications of the concept.

Dharma is a good example of continuity and reinterpretation in religion. A “key term of Aryan self-understanding”,³⁵ dharma in Vedic times referred to the reenactment and sustaining of the cosmological order through the correct performance of the Vedic rites and sacrifices. A strong association with praxis comes out in the various translations of dharma that I gave examples of above, e.g. custom, prescription; rule; duty; virtue, moral merit, good works (MacDonnell 1958). According to Kunst: “The identification of dharma with action is repeated in the *RV* [*Rig Veda*]³⁶ several times” (Kunst 1978:7).

A “pivotal” concept³⁷ in later Hinduism, it was extended to include the upholding of society through correct social conduct, as well as serving as an ideology for distinguishing between groups that were within and outside the pale of the Aryan race. It became “primarily and essentially the *varṇaśramadharma*,”³⁸ the order of the castes and the stages of life which breaks down into countless specific rules and cannot at all be derived from a general principle

³⁵ Halbfass 1988: 332

³⁶ See Glossary

³⁷ Halbfass 1988: 332

³⁸ See Glossary at the end

of behaviour”³⁹ As opposed to the universalism of Buddhist *dhamma*, the application of Hindu dharma is particular and hereditary, and its application is differentiated according to the group one belongs to (Halbfass 1988: 332-33; Hinnells 1995: 135, Creel 1977: 6). In traditional and orthodox Hinduism, the concept appears as Indocentric and Brahmanocentric (Halbfass 1988:319-20). “...[I]t assigns specific norms to specific groups and excludes the mlecccha [the barbarian, the non-Indian] by definition (Halbfass 1988:320).

When intellectual contact between India and the West increased, attempts were made by Neo-Hindu thinkers and reformers to reinterpret dharma as a concept with a universally religious and ethical validity, applicable to all humanity.⁴⁰ Reformer and novelist Bankim Chandra Chatterjee, for instance, tried to de-link the notion of svadharma from the particularistic varnashradharma ideology, and develop it into an expression of an all-encompassing ethic of humanism. He wrote: “...Dharma is what conduces the well-being of man.”⁴¹ Simultaneously, others developed dharma into an apologetic tool for demonstrating the seniority and spiritual superiority of Hinduism against especially Christianity (Halbfass 1988: 345-46). Adjusting a notion which regulates social stratification within a framework of caste to accomodate Western-derived humanist ideas of universal equality in rights and status has remained a continuous challenge to many Hindu thinkers and reformers up to this day.

In many descriptions of dharma, it comes across with a strong communal, or social, orientation (e.g. Halbfass 1988). The accent in dharma is on the maintenance of society, with a “premium upon collective authority rather than individual initiative” (Creel 1977:19; see also 15-20). Discussions of dharma in classical literature frequently focus on questions of conduct for the individual in society (see e.g. Bhagavadgita chapter 3). According to Lingat, “[Dharma] is essentially social ... the individual who obeys its precepts performs a duty which is as much social as religious” (Lingat 1973:4).

Interestingly, the concept of dharma does not involve a distinct typological distinction between different precepts according to if they are based on religion, the legal order, or just custom and habit (P. Hacker 1978, quoted in Halbfass 1988:314). The operation of dharma extends beyond the realm of humans, and comprises the natural order as well. According to Gonda, “...stability and regularity in the cosmos and nature on the one hand and order and correct behaviour of a moral, social and legal type on the other do not fundamentally differ” (Gonda vol. 1 1960-63, *Die Religionen Indiens*, Stuttgart, p. 289f.; quoted in Halbfass

³⁹Halbfass 1988: 320

⁴⁰Halbfass 1988: 334-48

⁴¹Bankim ChandraChatterji 1965:19; in: Ray 1986:43.

1988:312). According to Lingat, dharma “envelops the moral world as much as the physical” (Lingat 1973:3).

A peculiar feature of dharma is its self-referential character. It is both normative and descriptive, in the sense that what can be empirically demonstrated to be socially accepted conduct is also the norm. In ethics, a contrast between the absolute and the relative is not distinguished, where social convention can be bounced against a notion of natural law (Halbfass 1988: 324, 332-34, 348). “[N]o notion of a transcendent Dharma as the criterion of the several Dharmas of the social and political universe is found”, according to Creel (A.B. Creel 1977: 5). The self-referential character of dharma is suggested in Radhakrishnan’s statement that dharma is “...the principle of a thing by virtue of which it is what it is” (Radhakrishnan 1948:130, in: Halbfass 1988:337).

That dharma is simultaneously its own justification and precept would be another way of putting it. It is interesting to relate this aspect of dharma to the development of legal thought in India. According to Lingat (1973:258): “The classical legal system in India substitutes the notion of *authority* for that of [the Western notion of] legality”. This means that legality is not based primarily on positive enactment, as in Western jurisprudence. Instead, the legality of a precept resides in its consonance with the given and pre-established writ of dharma (in a legal context understood as duty according to custom) (Lingat :xii; See also 257-259, and Larson:143, 220-21). “Society is thus organised on the model of itself, with which it is presented, as if it had actually achieved it” (Lingat: 258). It appears that there are certain similarities between classical Indian jurisprudence and the prescription-description legitimisation strategy that I describe in the field data.

4.7 How Important Is Dharma?

This section contains a few remarks on the significance of dharma in the Hindu traditions, its historical relevance today and the utility of dharma for interpreting conceptual change.

- A Supplier of Premises and Assumptions

I have noted how many of the features that can be observed in the field data bear a distinct similarity to features that are found in the concept of dharma. Further, it seems fairly apparent from my analysis that these features of dharma inform the experience of and discourse on religion among my informants.

I introduced above (see p. 26) the idea that the significance of dharma lies in its function as an “underlying conceptual framework” in Hinduism. A consequence of this is that the conceptual changes and developments we can detect among informants must be interpreted in light of the concept of dharma.

This finds support in Creel, who writes: “...dharma underlies religious practices, theistic sects and higher philosophies in India” (Creel 1977:2). To Halbfass the importance of dharma lies in its being an overarching common ground of reference for Hindu self-understanding and identity, a mutually agreed framework for discourse. No other concept is a better expression of coherence in the main traditions, he argues (Halbfass 1991:13-15). Elsewhere he writes that dharma “...has been traditionally used to characterise what is most intrinsic to Hinduism,...” (Halbfass 1988: 341). Fitzgerald sees in dharma “the fundamental unifying principle” and “analytical centre of gravity” of Hinduism (Fitzgerald 1990: 113).

To Klostermaier dharma is more than a framework for discourse or a fundamental principle: “In the strictest and fullest sense dharma coincides with Hinduism” (Klostermaier 1994:52).

The notion of dharma, I propose, is a supplier of premises and assumptions that inform discourse in different Hindu traditions. This is what I meant when I said that dharma is an underlying conceptual framework of Hinduism.

- Historical Relevance

A question to consider is the relevance of using an ancient notion as dharma for understanding developments in a contemporary diaspora religion. The question is indirectly addressed by Larson in his underlining of the co-existence of old and new in India’s history, and his insistence that this is a constitutive feature of her culture. Ideas and concepts have a contemporary actuality in Indian culture regardless of chronological provenance (Larson: 143-144, 155, 157-58, 162).

Halbfass on several occasions mentions Indian lack of interest in chronology in her historiographic tradition, and observes that Indian authors maintain that Western historical and chronological methods are not suitable on Indian material (Halbfass 1988: 349-50; also

348, 367). A generally ahistorical quality in Indian historiography is sometimes mentioned by other writers.⁴² According to Kunst, the concept of dharma has “...despite diverse interpretations, retained its essential continuity in meaning...” (Kunst 1978:4).

This continuity comprises continuity in relevance too. According to Halbfass: “Even in its modern reinterpretation and universalization, the concept of dharma has remained the expression of the Hindu sense of identity and continuity...no radical break with tradition has taken place” (Halbfass 1988: 347-348). Creel shows how dharma plays a role in informing contemporary Indian academic philosophical thought (Creel 1977:116-137).

The contemporary relevance of dharma is also demonstrated in the way many aspects of dharma show up in the field data.

- The Usefulness of Dharma in Interpretation

In a critique of studies on diasporic Hindus in Britain, Searle-Chatterjee observes:

“...it is generally presumed that a given phenomenon, the same as that found in India, is being studied, ignoring the fact that similar actions, words and claims may have totally different meanings and functions in different contexts...” (Searle-Chatterjee 2000: 505).

A way to avoid the problem that Searle-Chatterjee describes can be achieved by distinguishing between praxis and conceptualisation in a religious tradition. This analytical distinction is useful because developments in praxis and conceptual phenomena can occur independently of one another. This is the distinction I make in my analysis of the field data when I emphasise what informants *think* about religion, rather than on what they *do*. This opposition can also be expressed in terms of conceptualisation vs. praxis.

By praxis I mean “concrete” phenomena such as observances, ritual practices, organisational patterns and so forth. Phenomena related to conceptualisation are e.g. assumptions, premises, concepts etc. These are non-concrete phenomena that are located in the realm of thought. Conceptual phenomena are thus harder to observe and describe.

Developments in praxis phenomena may proceed in any direction over time. For example, ritual practices may be conserved, modified, disappear and return again. Therefore, observations of such developments do not necessarily tell us much about what simultaneously may be occurring on the conceptual level. Developments of the conceptual kind, I submit, are slower, more stable, and will over time tend to militate towards modes of thought in the

⁴²Writing on this aspect of South Asian historiography and discourse sometimes seems to exhibit an essentializing character, potentially lending it a slightly orientalist flavour. The notion should therefore be treated with some caution, I think.

dominant host culture (e.g. Western society). On the other hand, developments and changes in praxis can be suspended temporarily or even reversed. It would be a mistake, for example, to conclude that a Hindu immigrant who does not keep up the Hindu traditions has shed his religion due to the influence of Western culture. The explanation may simply be that he would wish to maintain his traditions, but that he for various reasons does not have the opportunity to do so at the moment. Such a situation can change according to circumstances and personal dispositions.

An example of a situation like this can be taken from the literature on diaspora Hindus. Here it is sometimes mentioned how, during early years of settlement in a Western country, the predominantly male Hindu immigrants gave less priority to practicing religion. A perfectly reasonable conclusion for a contemporary observer could have been something like this: “Among Hindus, migration to a Western country leads to a decrease in the practice religion”. As it turns out, however, with the later arrival of women and the creation of families, an interest in the practice of religion has in fact grown since the early arrival of mainly male immigrants.⁴³

The example illustrates how observation merely of what a person does may lead us to miss developments in the conceptual aspects of this person’s religion. An alternative, but just as relevant interpretation in the case of the example that I have used could be that the premise (a conceptual aspect) that rituals are desirable has been retained among Hindus, but that the actual practice of rituals has temporarily receded due to various practical circumstances.

Again, the observable features (praxis) of diasporic Hinduism may also *not* change much, potentially leading to the mistaken potentially mistaken conclusion that its conceptual features remain unaltered. For example, a Hindu in India and a Hindu in Europe may have very different thoughts on his reasons for observing a ritual, even though they are doing exactly the same thing. This is because with the “European” Hindu, one might imagine, certain developments have taken place on the conceptual level, but not necessarily in praxis.

Since dharma plays such an important role in the conceptualisation of religion among Hindus, interpreting change in light of dharma is a good strategy for avoiding the type of problem that Searle-Chatterjee describes.

⁴³see e.g. Burghart 1987:9; Kramer 1980:17; Knott 1991:95-97; Ballard 1996:18

PART II

4.8 The Western Concept of Religion

Some of the determinants that have contributed to shape the conceptual content of religion in Western society can be seen in the nature and development of Western religion (i.e. Christianity), developments in language usage, the evolution of modernity and the process of secularisation in Western society and culture. In Northern Europe the emergence of Protestantism further enhanced many of the effects of modernity and secularisation. These developments mainly began in Europe of the 16th century.

In this section I summarise some features of these developments, using input from historian of religion W.C. Smith and the influential sociologist Peter Berger, among others. They discuss conceptions of religion that are common in Norway.

4.9 Conceptualisation of Religion in the Development of Christianity and in Language⁴⁴

W.C. Smith states in his book *The Meaning and End of Religion*: "...the way that we use words is a significant index of how we think" (W.C. Smith 1978:16). By this he introduces his argument that to understand other people we must first critically examine the meanings and usages of the terms and concept that we ourselves use, and further, that we allow for the possibility that meanings that others assign to a word may be different from our own.

Taking the word "religion" as an example, Smith shows how its modern meaning and associative content is the outcome of a close connection since Roman times between its semantic evolution and the development of Christianity in Europe. "Religion" is thus a vehicle for a uniquely Western concept that cannot readily to be applied to the religious traditions of other cultures, ancient or contemporary, he argues.

Scholars are somewhat divided as to the earliest etymology and meaning of the Latin *religio*, which has become the modern "religion". To the Romans, the word referred primarily to the ceremonies and rites that may or may not have been associated with a particular God. It reflects the Roman sense of the divine as being connected not so much with a deity as with the outward observance of ritualised acts. With the advent of the Church new meanings and ideas were added. To illustrate how much the word has changed its meaning since classical times, W.C. Smith cites the *Oxford Classical Dictionary*: "No word in either Greek or Latin

⁴⁴Unless marked otherwise, all of this section is based on p.19-49 in W.C. Smith (1978)

corresponds exactly to English 'religion'." (Cary, M et als 1949:758).⁴⁵ From late classical times and throughout the middle ages the word fell out of use and received scant or no attention, according to Smith.

Contemporary concepts of "religion" have been to a very large extent been shaped by developments in Europe from the High Renaissance to the Romantic period. The time span includes important developments in the history of Christianity (notably, the Reformation and its aftermath), the discoveries of new peoples and their religions, and the emergence of the natural sciences.

Smith discusses how various semantic accretions and deposits have been inherited from this period in European history, and combined to result in conceptualisations of religion that are common in the West today. Below I summarise from his discussion important aspects of these conceptualisations (note that many of these developments have particular relevance for Protestant areas).

The seventeenth century the saw development of a notion of religion as a body of thought, or system, of ideas that can be put under rational scrutiny. The idea emerged that the truth or falsity of a religion could be determined by a methodical examination of its doctrines (W.C. Smith 1978:37-39). A legacy of this idea, according to Smith, "...is the tendency still today to ask, in explanation of 'the religion' of a people, What do they believe? - as though this were a basic, even *the* basic question" (ib.:1978:40). Elsewhere, Smith puts it: "The peculiarity of the place given to belief in Christian history is a monumental matter..." (ib.:180). The characteristic importance given to faith is coupled with a tradition of intellectualism (ib.: 181). With the idea of religion as a generic class, there arose the view that there are different religions, or varieties, within the class of religion (ib.:39, 43-44, 49). Other developments, in the nineteenth century, that have influenced thinking about religion today, were attempts to search for and define an essence in religion, and the idea of religion as a generic phenomenon, something that can be discriminated from other human activities (44-49, 51). Our modern usage of religion has further been influenced by the nineteenth century emphasis on attitude and personal piety in religion (ib.:48). Smith notes that although Christianity, as other religions, holds that faith must lead to faith-inspired practice, the connection between faith and practice is less immediate compared to other religions. This

⁴⁵Smith quotes from the 1st edition of this work. The wording in the newer 3rd edition (1996) seems more precise: "The semantics of Greek and Latin in this regard are very different from those of modern European languages." (The Oxford Classical Dictionary 1996 (3rd ed):1301. Hornblower, S. and A. Spawforth (eds). Oxford: Oxford UP).

would be particularly true in the case of comparison between Christianity and, for example, Theravada Buddhism (ib. 178-179).

4.10 Conceptualisation of Religion under Secularisation and Modernity

- Individualisation and differentiation

In Peter Berger's presentation of the secularisation thesis, two of its important features are individualisation and differentiation. These developments had consequences for the conceptualisation of religion.

As a result of individualisation (Berger also calls it "privatization") religion increasingly became a matter of personal choice and personal preference. At the same time, the religious preferences and traditions of the community play a lessening role for the individual. Private concerns tend to be emphasised in the activity and promotion of religion, and a kind of "psychologisation" occurs (Berger 1990:133-134, 147-148). According to McGuire, "...the very discovery of the individual ...is a peculiarly *modern* feature of society...", as is also the concept that one can freely choose one's religion (McGuire 1992:251, 265).

At the heart of the secularisation thesis lays the proposal that the influence of religion is diminishing in various sectors of society and culture, accompanied by an increasing differentiation between different social spheres. Berger credits Protestantism as one of the major forces in bringing about this development (Berger 1990:111). The effect of such differentiation, in the words of McGuire, is that "...the norms, values and practices of the religious sphere have only indirect influence on other spheres such as business, politics, leisure time activities, education and so on" (McGuire 1992:251).

W.L. King points out that the Western tendency to compartmentalise religion is reflected in the scientific attempts to define "religion" generically, to isolate it as a discrete subject matter that can be studied separately. Such definitions tend to stress a difference between religion and other cultural dimensions. Dichotomous assumptions such as these are hard to escape since they are embedded in the structures of language (King 1987:282). We see an example of this cultural assumption occurring in Durkheim's famous definition of religion with the phrase "...sacred things, that is to say things set apart and forbidden..." (Durkheim 1995:44).

- *Legitimation, Rationality, Faith*

Individualisation and differentiation open up to new sources and types of legitimisation. With the introduction of choice in religion, what Berger calls a “market situation” arises, where religion must be “sold”. As previously established plausibility structures (also a term from Berger) no longer can be taken for granted, they become open to rational scrutiny and discussion. Religion thus cannot be authoritatively imposed (Berger 1990:38ff). According to McGuire, “[t]he main feature of legitimacy in contemporary society is that the differentiation process has resulted in competition and conflict among the various sources of legitimacy of authority” (McGuire 1992:254).

The systematic commitment in modernity to rationality, i.e. logically consistent and universalisable principles (J.F. Wilson, J.F. 1987:19), with their counterpart in a Christian tradition of intellectualism (B. Wilson 1982: 65), provide a basis for a certain *type* of legitimisation, or basis for authority. According to Weber, the key feature of rationalisation (an outcome of secularisation) is “[t]he *belief* that all phenomena *can* be rationally explained” (Weber,⁴⁶ as interpreted by McGuire 1992:263).

This intellectualism in Christianity seems to have a corollary in an emphasis on belief, which I also mentioned under the discussion based on W.C. Smith above. According to B. Wilson, “...the Church taught that rites were not enough, that volition and commitment, belief and faith, were the real requirements for Christian salvation. Slowly (and more impressively after the Reformation) that message had its effect” (B. Wilson 1982:56-57).

- *Universalism*

Universalism, according to B. Wilson, was one of the features that established a significant difference between Christianity and the other faiths of the Roman Empire. It was above all their beliefs, and not their background (ethnicity, language, culture etc) that essentially defined the identity of Christians (Wilson, B. 1996:12-13). As intellectualism in Christianity has a counterpart in the rationalism of modernity, so also universalism in Christianity has its counterpart in the development of a universalistic ethics (i.e. the norm of treating all people according the same generalized principles), due to the process of secularisation. Religious motives and legitimations played a central role in bringing about this mentality (Weber 1925,⁴⁷ as interpreted by McGuire 1992:262). Comments B. Wilson:

⁴⁶Weber: *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (1904). Transl. by T. Parsons 1958.

⁴⁷Weber: *The Theory of Social and Economic Organization* (1925). Transl. by T. Parsons (1947) 1964. See Introduction by T. Parsons, p. 80.

“...[U]niversalism...became a powerful intellectual and rational orientation in the modernizing world” (Wilson, B. 1982:179).

4.11 Features of Protestantism

Input from Protestantism has been important for the conceptualisation of religion in those areas of Europe where it gained a foothold. Based on M.E. Marty’s article on Protestantism, I summarise below some important features of Protestantism (Marty 1982:23-38).

Protestantism places an emphasis on formulation of belief and the verbal expression of religion (ib.:30, 37). In the words of Marty, “...Protestantism honors “heart religion”, [and] insists on heartfelt response to the word and the claims of God upon the mind...” (ib.:32). The “cognitive dimensions of its faith” (ib.: 32) are actualised in the aspect of Protestantism as “supremely a religion of the word” (ib.:34). A particular feature of Protestantism is its emphasis on individual assent and choice in the grasp of faith (ib.:31, 33). “Protestantism, through its tendency toward individualism, expects more of an internalization and personal application of the message of the church” (ib.:35). Regarding ritual, we find a degree of distancing from ritual. Some varieties of Protestant theology tend to demystify ritual in the sense of it having an inherent power/effect (ib.:32-35).

4.12 Conclusion to Part I and II

The features of dharma discussed in Part I represent assumptions that structure the conceptualisation of religion among Hindus. The developments discussed in Part I represent important contributions to modern-day Western understandings of “religion”. These have become basic assumptions in conceptualisations of religion that are common in Norway.

I conclude this chapter by taking an aspect of dharma that is relevant to each of the five general themes of analysis (cf. Table 1, p. 29) and set it point by point against a complementary aspect of Western religion:

- The application and realisation of dharma is primarily oriented towards the social in a broad sense, i.e. the community of its followers and how they live. In chapter 5 (“We Hindus and I”) we can see many examples of how this is realised in the pervasive collective aspect to informants’ religious experience. From the discussion of Western religion above, we can

clearly see how it differs from dharma in its orientation towards the individual. Thus the dichotomy posited in chapter 5 between the collective and the individual.

- Dharma is primarily particularistic, and applies only to its own followers. It cannot be transferred to other communities or individual members of other communities. This feature of dharma appears to be realised in a notion among informants that only those who are born as Hindus can be Hindus. This notion contrasts with a universalism in Western religion, which was inherited from early Christianity and later enhanced due the effects of secularisation. In “Who Can Be a Hindu?” (chapter 6) I discuss how the views of informants seem to express a tension between particularism in dharma and universalism in Western religion.
- Under the concept of dharma, the temporal and the religious is interconnected and overlapping, in daily life, in ritual. In “Apart from Religion” (chapter 7) I present examples of how religious/ritual activities and various other cultural activities are closely linked in the lives of informants. In chapter 7 I also discuss a tendency among informants to de-link the close connection between religion and other activities. This de-linking can be interpreted as an instance of a movement towards a Western concept of religion, where religion is differentiated from other activities.
- Strategies for rationalisation and legitimisation within the concept of dharma do not primarily make recourse to rationalistic inference from external, universally accepted presuppositions. Instead it refers to authority (e.g. established custom). Justification of precepts is directed mainly towards an audience of its own followers, not other communities. This approach to legitimisation is what I called the prescription-description strategy that I discuss in chapter 8, “Reason to Believe”. Among some informants, though, we can find a pronounced sense of dissatisfaction with this strategy. Attempts at finding new types of legitimisation can be seen as a result of the influence of secularisation and modernity, but also of features internal to the tradition of Western religion. I have labeled these new attempts at legitimisation “the explication strategy”.
- Compared with Western religion, the concept of dharma interferes little in matters of doctrine and faith, and is primarily oriented towards praxis, e.g. ritual. In “To Believe Or To Do?” (chapter 9), we can see this feature realised in the general emphasis placed on praxis as a component in informants’ experience of religion. But at the same time we can detect an influence from Western religion in the way some informants feel that disposition, attitude and commitment are more important than the upkeep of rituals.

At the end of my discussion of dharma I asked: How important is dharma? In answer to my question I argued that dharma is a supplier of premises and assumptions that inform

religious discourse among Hindus, and that it retains a historical continuity in relevance and meaning. I also argued that because dharma is a supplier of premises and assumptions for the conceptualisation of religion among Hindus, an understanding of dharma is helpful in interpreting changes and developments in diaspora Hinduism.

A central purpose of this chapter has been to show how, when we approach another religion, we expect it to conform to our own unconsciously maintained conceptualisations of what religion is. Our understanding of another religion is therefore modelled according to these conceptualisations. Speaking generally, we can say that distortions occur when we study cultural phenomena that we are unfamiliar with. This is because limitations in language cause us to project unconsciously our assumptions onto categories that have an apparent similarity to our own categories. Likewise, difficulties arise when someone from another culture tries to mediate his own concepts through codes that he may not be aware are alien in reference and content, or only partially correspond to his own codes.⁴⁸ Words like religion and dharma exemplify such a case.

This chapter concludes the theoretical discussions of Part 1 of the thesis. Part 2 follows with a discussion of the field data.

⁴⁸An interesting example of this is the challenge faced by Indian theologians in developing an Indian terminology that adequately reflects the contents of Christian theological concepts. For an interesting account of problems involved in Indianizing Christian theological terminology, see Boyd, R.H.S 1991: *An Introduction to Indian Christian Theology*, esp. pp. 228-254.

PART 2

ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

5 WE HINDUS AND I

...it's as if my family are my faith!

- Vinita

5.1 Introduction

In this chapter I explore the meaning of and relationship between the sphere of the collective and the sphere of the individual among the persons I interviewed.

In literature on living Hinduism, i.e. as Hindus actually practise it, the important role of the family is frequently mentioned. Dube states (Dube 1978: 229): “The Hindu family is a social, economic, and ritual unit. These three components are inextricably interwoven in the norms that govern behavioural patterns of its members”⁴⁹ Most rituals are in fact performed in the context of the family and the home, a context that also surrounds the transmission of Hinduism to the younger generations. The primary sources of knowledge about religious beliefs and practices are usually parents or other adult relatives. In India a person’s religion is traditionally defined according to the community he is born into, and not according to what he personally believes in or practices. It follows that a collective orientation is an important feature of Hinduism.

Another important feature of Hinduism is the concern for release from this world of pain and suffering, a concern that ultimately involves only the individual. Related to this is the traditional interest in the innermost soul, or the presence of divine power in this soul. Many have thus observed that Hinduism displays a tension between two aspects that are in opposition to each other. These can be described as Hinduism’s temporal aspects (e.g society,

⁴⁹For more examples of this, see e.g. Kanitkar 1989, an introductory school textbook that gives a good picture of the all-important role of the family in the life of individuals, in social and economic relationships as well as in the context of ritual (pp. 18-29). Kim Knott frequently notes throughout her work (Knott 1986) the important role of domestic ritual practices among Leeds Hindus. Jean Bacon writes: “While living with a family in northern India, I became acutely conscious that a heightened awareness of social relationships dominated the daily lives of my hosts.” (Bacon 1996:11).

the world) and its eternal aspects (transcendence, renunciation). Kinsley (1982:82-91), for instance, describes this as a tension between dharma (correct behaviour, the temporal) and *moksha* (salvation, the eternal). Heesterman sees this as a tension between two opposing aspects within dharma itself, what he calls the “inner conflict of tradition” (Heesterman 1985:1-25). Louis Dumont says that an understanding of Indian religions is best attained by introducing a dichotomy between man-in-the-world and individual-outside-the-world (Dumont 1980:184-187). On the basis of the general discourse evident in my fieldwork material I have chosen to pursue my discussion in terms of a dichotomy between a “collective” and an “individual” focus.⁵⁰ These terms seem to fit better with the thoughts and language of my informants.

First I discuss what we can deduce from the data about the role of the collective, and secondly, what we can deduce about the role of the individual. Some of my questions are: How, and in which contexts do these two aspects play a role? What is the relationship between the two, and which is the most important?

5.2 The Role of the Collective

All references in the text of the interviews to family and relatives, Hindu neighbours and friends, the Hindu community in Norway and the world will be covered by the term “collective”. This also applies to references to the Indian nation or the state of being Indian. Whenever these themes are referred to or discussed by the informants, the data will be treated as potential information on the role and meaning of the collective. My intention is to use this information to explore the relative collective focus among my informants.

Anyone with friends and acquaintances among Hindus will discover that a collective focus is very important. A simple word count of the interview material appears to support this impression. It turns out that words relating to the immediate collective⁵¹ are very frequent and that they occur roughly the *same* number of times as any other words one might expect to be frequent in a conversation about being a Hindu, i.e. words like “religion”, “faith”, “belief”, “God”, “Hindu”, “Indian”, “India”. Of course, this does not mean that the theme of e.g. family will be an important topic whenever Hindus talk about religion. A couple of interviewees in fact say little about the role of their families or the general collective, even

⁵⁰ I should clarify at this point that I am not implying any reference to a discourse on individuation. My term “individual” is not intended to contrast with Marriott’s term “dividual”.

⁵¹ Examples of words that refer to the “immediate collective”: All possible combinations and declensions of words denoting family members, the core family unit, relatives, friends.

though the general theme of the interviews is Hinduism. Moreover, I strongly emphasise here that a quantitative word count such as this does not necessarily tell us much by itself, and its use can be criticised in a context of qualitative research. Even so, the word count does seem to give us a clue about the strong collective focus in Hinduism.

A less ambiguous picture emerges if we look at the *contexts* in which references to the collective occur. To this end the method of analysis I have chosen is to note all occurrences of words in the material that pertain to the collective in a broad sense⁵², and then to examine their context. Using this method, I have identified and categorised the following contexts: religious identity; legitimisation; transmission; beliefs and practices; discussing religion with others.

It should be noted that the contexts may overlap thematically, and that it can be difficult sometimes to decide under which context we should place an utterance. A single statement can be interpreted as belonging to more than one context. For instance, a simple statement like this: “We [speaking of the family] celebrate *hawan* because my father does it” (Shubra, interview no. 5) can tell us two things: First, it tells us that *hawan* is practised in a family context (beliefs and practices), and secondly that *hawan* is practised for the reason that the father practises this ritual (legitimation).

- Religious Identity

I have labelled this contextual category “Religious Identity” since it refers to statements that say something about the relationship between personal religious identity and collective identity. Throughout the interviews a close association between religious identity and family background is very prominent. Sometimes informants would use “Indian” and “Hindu” interchangeably, giving the impression that religious identity and ethnicity/national identity imply each other. This is the case with 25-year-old Kavita, who says in this exchange:

R: If somebody asks, I tell them I am Hindu. That’s because my whole family descends from a Hindu family. That’s why I am Hindu too, somehow. If I had been born into a Christian family, I am sure I would have said I was a Christian.

Q: *Are you sure?*

R: Yes, of course. People ask what I am, and I *am* Indian. My hair is black, and anybody can see that I am Indian.

⁵²This comprises the same terms that I included under the “immediate collective”, but also extending to the wider Hindu community, such as “Hindus in general”, “India”.

Tushar apparently makes this connection unconsciously by using “Indian” and “Hindu” interchangeably within the space of a single sentence: “...I have always been taught at home that I am Hindu, I am Indian, that I am Hindu, somehow...”. Speaking of marriage, Vinita casually seems to make the same connection: “You should preferably marry an *Indian* boy. It’s just the way it is, because after all you are *Hindu*”[my italics]. Gopal also associates national identity with a particular religious identity when relating the following incident: “Once somebody asked me whether I was Sunni or Shia [assuming he was Pakistani]. Then I replied that I come from another country.” Kamlesh says: “Being part of a religion is a very natural thing for me. I believe— you know all Indians are born as Hindus. And no matter how they live they can say that they are Hindus.” To Sushil the connection is quite explicit: “To me Hinduism and India are virtually synonymous”.

These statements exemplify how my informants generally associate their religious identity with a community, with an emphasis primarily on family and heritage, but also on country and ethnicity. This association is much more than a mere connotation, since for them being part of a Hindu community is considered a primary criterion to Hindu religious identity.

In other words, who you are in terms of religion is defined according to the community— the collective — you are born into. A statement like “I am a Hindu” is equally a statement about religious preference as about social identity. Interestingly, informants’ views were more varied when we discussed what they thought about the nature of this relationship among Norwegians. Two informants were of the opinion that being Norwegian means being Christian, whereas others would be less clear about this. Most informants did not think there was any necessary connection between being Norwegian and Christian, as in this example from Gopal: “...[T]his is probably the difference between India and Norway, that Norwegians either say that they are Christians or not. In India we all say we are Hindus...”.

Parenthetically I must add that I think one should be very hesitant about interpreting statements that link Hinduism and country as necessarily expressions of a religious nationalism — what is often loosely termed Hindu fundamentalism. What to make out of this connection is not my task here, but as far as my general knowledge of the Indian Hindu community in Oslo goes, there seem to be few grounds for concluding that “fundamentalism” has a strong influence among the Hindus of Norway. However, Searle-Chatterjee is critical of the tendency among researchers to ignore the potential political aspects of diaspora Hinduism (Searle-Chatterjee 2000:508,509).

It is well to note that the connection between being Hindu and Indian is no straightforward issue. India is a country not only of many different religions, but where the

internal variation within the majority Hindu religion is quite great. This in contrast to e.g. Sikhism, where it can be said that religious identity and ethnicity are co-extensive since virtually all Sikhs are from Punjab, and share a comparatively unified doctrinal position. The difficulties and challenges of building a common Hindu platform for Hindus from different parts of India are frequently reported in the literature on diaspora Hinduism.

The apparently inseparable association between religious identity and collective may at first seem somewhat strange to a Westerner, although it actually is quite common in many religious traditions. But Western ways can appear strange to Hindus too. Says a Bengali informant:

Sometimes Norwegians say that they are not Christians, even when they are born in a Christian family. When they say that, they mean that they are not religious. That is hard for us to understand, how you can be born a Christian and say you are not a Christian. (Fieldwork 1, interview 3).

To get a better idea of what this contrast involves, we can construct a statement that could be typical of a Protestant Christian: “I am Christian because I believe in Christ”. In such a credo any reference to group is conspicuously absent. The focus here is rather on the individual and what he believes in, as opposed to my informants, whose credo tends to focus on which social group they belong to. Out of the formal interviews and numerous conversations I have had, I believe only one person emphasises choice – an individual focus. Kamlesh says: “I am Hindu because I was born a Hindu, and because I have chosen to remain Hindu.”

In this section we saw that informants quite consistently associate their Hindu identity with family or ethnicity, i.e. the collective. Indeed, their personal religious identity is explained as a direct consequence of family inheritance. Typically and repeatedly they tell me “I am Hindu *because* my parents are Hindu” [my italics] (Shanti, interview 7).

- Legitimation

Just as with religious identity, the collective association stands out throughout the text of the interviews in contexts of legitimisation. In practice this means the immediate collective – that is family, relatives and friends. By “a context of legitimisation” I mean statements or exchanges where informants offer information about explanation and justifications for practices or beliefs. The following discussion of these contexts identifies instances of the collective used as a source of legitimisation.

A typical example is this excerpt from the interview with Gopal, who is a computer science student at the University of Oslo: “In our family we believe that God is God, regardless if you call him Jesus or Ramji. That’s what Daddy says.” Reference to the collective is usually quite explicit, as in the following quote from Tushar, whose mother admonishes him to do a prayer before going for a job interview. “I do this because Mother wants me to, but personally I don’t believe it makes any difference”, he says. Vinita repeatedly explains that although she personally does not have any strong interest in attending services at the temple, she will go if her mother wants to, and because it pleases her parents. Participation in religious gatherings and services does not usually evoke a lot of enthusiasm among most informants,⁵³ especially the males.

Pleasing parents is nevertheless the dominant reason for attending services in the temple or the private religious gatherings called *kirtans*. These are informal weekend get-togethers of friends and families which by turn are organised in someone’s home, and which involve a *puja* and singing of devotional songs. Typically, the young spend the evening in another room, chatting, playing a game or watching a video while their parents participate in the *puja* ceremony. After the religious ceremonies they join their parents for the traditional common meal and socialising which sometimes continue until late in the evening.

Watching videos or playing games is of course not possible when it comes to temple functions, since it does not have room for activities of that kind. Even so, many tell me that the main attraction of temple visits is to meet friends and to socialise, and sometimes also to get a chance to meet young people of the opposite sex. This is especially true of the larger festivals, when the crowdedness might even provide opportunity for a little flirtation. 21 year-old Usha disapprovingly says: “Indian young people are only interested in seeing boys and girls when they go to the temple.” This may not be such a bad thing always, thinks Vinod, since it happens under parental control and in the company of Indians only. Sushil, who sometimes emphasises honor in connection with religion, says: “[i]t has got to do with the honor of the family for them [speaking of girls] to keep the religion.” (Interview 2). Again we see the link with the collective – the family in this case.

Apart from respecting parents’ wishes, another reason for attending religious gatherings is just to meet friends that they have not seen in a while, or sharing in the family fellowship. Several of my first-generation informants (Fieldwork 1) also think this is an important reason. “For Hindus I think the social is the most important thing about religious

⁵³ From the United States Fenton reports that “temple oriented worship (*puja*) has little resonance with second-generation college students, except for a few young women” (Fenton 1992:263).

gatherings” says Vijay. And Tushar, who often voices scepticism, explains: “...[R]eligious meetings are just an excuse for people to get together, not much else, really”. Breisteinslien, who in the mid 1980’s conducted a study of a family-based *bhajan* group in Bergen, Norway (Breisteinslien 1987:6), reports that for his informants the social aspect of worship is as important as the religious experience.

Complementary to the theme of how the collective is an important reference in a context of legitimisation is the theme of the different *strategies* that are used for legitimisation. This theme is treated separately in chapter 8, “Reason to Believe”.

- *Transmission*

That the collective plays an important part in legitimisation should come as no big surprise insofar as the collective is one of the most important sources and contexts for transmission of the Hindu heritage. It seems that only a limited number of studies have focused on the transmission of Hindu culture to younger generations. A recurring pattern in my interviews is that informants regularly refer to members of the family or rituals conducted in the home as their main source of information about religious practices and beliefs. Vinod, for example, says that he has learned the *mantras* he knows from his parents during *arti* rituals in the home, and Vinita has learned stories and myths of Hinduism from listening to her mother reading to her as a child. From his grandmother Tushar has learned about places in India “where mysterious things can happen”, and it was Shanti’s cousin-sister in India who taught her how to do prayers. Other sources of information can be videos⁵⁴, cartoons⁵⁵ and sometimes even public school.⁵⁶ But most information is received in the home, simply by watching and partaking in the daily life of a Hindu household. Hindus do not usually put their young under any systematic training, as in many Islamic and Christian traditions. Practices and beliefs are so thoroughly enmeshed into daily life and taken so much for granted that virtually all informants, younger and older, reply in the negative when I ask if they have received any

⁵⁴ Informants frequently mention Indian video films as a source of cultural information as well as entertainment. Since the technology became widely available after the 70’s, home videos have come to play a particularly important part in the transmission of and exposure to Hindu culture for Indians abroad. According to Jackson and Nesbitt: “In many cases it is from Indian movies, through the songs, dances and colourful festivals, that children gain familiarity both with a deity’s visual representation and with mythological stories.” (Jackson and Nesbitt 1993:135). Breisteinslien also notes the importance of video machines among his informants as a means of staying in touch with Indian culture and religion (Breisteinslien 1987:39). For further reading on the relevance of visual images and video, see Nesbitt 1991:27-30.

⁵⁵ A large variety of cartoons for children depicting Hindu mythology and epics are published in India.

⁵⁶ Three informants told me this. Tushar in interview 6, for example, says that he has learned so little about Hinduism at home, that for him religious education in public school has been the main source of (formal) knowledge about Hinduism.

systematic teaching of some kind in their families. This point seems to be noteworthy given that nearly half of my core informants come from Brahmin families. Kavita has the following thoughts on rearing children of her own:

When I get my own children I don't think I want to actively teach them religion. I would just want that the children absorb what they see, what their grandparents and their mother do. I have myself learned a few things from my parents over the years, and I hope I will be able to answer when my own children ask. I hope I can teach them some of the stories and stuff that I have learned.

My own observations generally, in and outside of Norway, suggest that Hindus to a very large extent learn about their religion in a family setting. In this respect it seems fair to expect that the role of the family in perpetuating the tradition becomes even more important in the diaspora, since the wider range of plausibility structures and sources of legitimisation in India are absent. Now and then I get the impression that diaspora Hinduism in Norway is so strongly tied to the family, that it almost looks as if each family represents its own variety of religion. This impression agrees with the suggestion of Maureen Michaelson that an investigation of Hindu religiosity must take into account the primacy of the family (1987:33, 49). One often hears phrases like: "In our family this is what we believe"; "the way we do it in our family"; "what my father says is this" etc, phrases which somehow suggest that the family unit serves as the benchmark for what is correct and customary. Vinita compares her own family with the often looser family structures among some of her Norwegian friends, and seems to draw the role of the collective to an extreme when she says: "These [speaking of her family] are the people I go to when I need help, or when I feel low, and who give me security. My family are the answer...it's as if my family are my faith!" Perhaps Kavita would have agreed with Vinita had she heard her statement about family being her faith. Says Kavita: "When I went to school and learned about Hinduism, we learned a lot of things that I had never heard about. But Hinduism to me is what I experience when I'm in India, with my family, or with Hindus in Norway."

Strikingly, there are virtually no references in the interviews to Holy Scriptures, commentaries or other devotional literature as authority for or source of information about practices and beliefs. When questions arise, young informants turn to their parents or other family members.

- Beliefs and Practices

Just as the collective is the main source and context for legitimisation, the collective is an important reference whenever beliefs and practices are mentioned or discussed. In this section I discuss a few examples of how the collective figures in accounts of beliefs and practices, and how it functions as the linchpin in a sense, of what people tell me is the content of Hinduism. Content is here defined as things that Hindus say that they actually do and/or believe in. I also include in this section some observations on prescriptions and prohibitions – another aspect of beliefs and practices.

Quite regularly informants use the personal pronoun in the plural when I ask about beliefs and practices. For instance, I might ask “what do you believe regarding...?”⁵⁷ Typically I received answers like: “What we believe in our family”. Whenever something is exemplified, people typically tell me what the habit is in their family, what a parent or another elder member of the family says, or what other Hindu families in general do. Kavita, for example, explains her beliefs about God, and then adds: “Maybe this is what Hinduism teaches, but in any case this is what Daddy thinks.” Vinita explains how Hinduism is not religion and, just like Kavita, she immediately points to what the situation is in her own family: “Never with us [i.e. our family], any way”.

As explained earlier, the interviews are often conducted in a form where the informant is allowed to speak to some extent about whatever he or she wants, and in a fairly loose sequence. An example of this is the following exchange with Shubra:

Q: Do you believe that the rituals have the power to do things for you in your own life?

R: In my life? Well, you must have faith in what you do, and then you'll always – if anybody seeks help, and really believes he'll get help, then you'll always get help in the end. I believe this. I do Hawan because it's relaxing and comforting. The atmosphere we get feels safe. I think this is very pleasant. We do it once a month. My mother is very religious. She believes a lot in Hawan and these things. I have even seen it has helped her a lot. And since I've seen it, I believe she can get help when she needs it.

This quote tells us that Shubra's mother is very religious, and that she believes in the effectiveness of rituals. This connects with information in the other interviews too, where we are often told that the mother is the person in the family who is most active in observing the rituals and keeping the religious prescriptions. But the point of interest here is that Shubra

⁵⁷Note: In Norwegian speech the singular and the plural is distinguished in the demonstrative pronoun, as opposed to in English where “you” denotes both plural and singular. In these questions, I used the singular to address informants.

almost unnoticably brings in the collective, despite that I specifically asked about her personal views on the subject.

Every now and then you can hear Hindus say that Hinduism is not religion but a way of life. To a Westerner this may seem to be a rather vague way of explaining the contents for their religion, but if we listen to what Tushar's father said during a conversation at the dinner table, we can get an idea of what this might mean: "Hinduism is about relations between family members, how they are supposed to behave towards each other, respect and love each other. This is the content of Hinduism, I believe."

Just before dinner Tushar himself had told me nearly the exact same thing. Obviously these views are shared by father and son. Tushar also said:

If you for example take a film about the *Ramayan* you will see that it says a lot about how family life should be, how family life in India, Hinduism should be. It doesn't go much into how much you are supposed to pray and what you should believe in and stuff like that. It's more about social life, customs in the family, respect for each other and stuff. There's a lot of that in the religion. Hinduism is about that – showing respect.⁵⁸

A 57-year old Punjabi businessman told me: "As far as I can understand, Hinduism is mostly about respect, respect for your parents – if you go strictly by the teachings of *Ramayana* and *Gita*. That is what I know about Hinduism, what my father and mother taught me."

(Fieldwork 1, interview 9). Vinita explains about the stories and myths of Hinduism that they all have a moral concerning loyalty, friendship and love. But on what Hinduism in Norway will be like in 30 years, Vinita thinks:

It will become an obligation. A duty-thing for the children. It'll be driving Mother and Father to the temple. It'll be arranging and organising things for them when they have lost their strength, probably. I think it's going to be a really hybrid – no, not quite – I think it is going to become a really practical thing.

The general impression clearly is that the religion of second-generation Hindus in Oslo is distinctly oriented towards the family and the collectivity. In their study of Hindu children in Great Britain, Jackson and Nesbitt observe (1993:46): "...[R]itual behaviour often illustrates and affirms certain family relationships...". A good example of such a ritual commonly observed in Hindu families is the annual *Rakshabandhan* ritual, where a sister ties a band around her brother's wrist as a token of sibling love. The brother will then give a gift to his sister. More specifically the ritual expresses a brotherly commitment to protect his sister, and

⁵⁸Returning momentarily to the theme of transmission, it is noteworthy that Tushar's source of information here is a video film.

for sisters a token of respect for her brother, an expression of the life-long link between them. Usually a girl ties the band around a brother's or cousin's wrist, but she may also select a male friend whom she likes or thinks of as a protector. Sometimes Rakshabandhan can be a way for boys and girls to express admiration – something like a Valentine. Kamlesh says why she likes rituals: "All these traditions, they are so much fun. They create joy, a family bond." Nearly all my interviewees say that they will not or very rarely observe any rituals alone or go to the temple or other religious gatherings unless accompanied by their parents.

Hinduism has many prohibitions and prescriptions, of which the tabu against beef is well-known. Daily life in many Hindu families is filled with a number of almost imperceptible prescriptions and tabus. Some are so taken for granted that they are hardly given a thought, and some are more consciously observed. Some observe a habit of not clipping one's nails after dark, and in some families it means bad luck if girls with a male sibling have a haircut on certain days. Shubra's mother told me that she will never do the dishes after having guests at their house until she is sure that they have arrived safely at their own home, as this can bring bad luck for the guests. The tabus that actually are observed, or even known to individual Hindus, can vary considerably. But according to my information, amongst Punjabi wives in Oslo the duty to fast on behalf of one's husband is widely practiced⁵⁹, as well as the tabu against using one's husband's proper name lest it be known by evil spirits. Sarita, a teacher, told me that she consistently used either a pronoun of respect or some euphemism to address her husband, and that she believed most of the Indian wives she knew did the same.

The object of tabus and prescriptions are very often parents and family. Except from Arvind, I have no recollection of any informants saying that they will refrain from something, or that there is something they are enjoined to do purely for the sake of God or a doctrine: "Things that I do for God are to play music and obey my parents. A lot of times I realise later that I should have listened more to my father regarding things I shouldn't have done." (Note that Arvind speaks of duties for God and parents in the same context). But then Shubra says that even though dharma teaches that you should obey your parents, they might still be wrong sometimes, and that's when you must listen to what she calls one's "inner voice".⁶⁰ Tushar says that he might have a drink or a cigarette once in a while, but that he avoids doing this in

⁵⁹*Karvachaut* is the name for this ritual practice.

⁶⁰Several female informants refer to the notion of an "inner voice" in various contexts. This notion may have attained currency due to Gandhi. In 1926, for example, he observed a *vrat* (a holy oath), where every Monday for a whole year was devoted to silence and listening to his inner voice. Louis Fischer describes this in his biography on Gandhi (1997:298-308).

front of his parents as it would be a sign of disrespect unless he and his parents were sharing a glass at home. Gopal tells me the same story, and explains that this would also apply in the company of any older family member, such as an older brother. Usha says she has never had any boy friends, and neither would she let any male stay overnight in her room because it would “disappoint my parents.” Children - especially girls - are generally expected to obey their parents by coming home early in the evenings. Disobedience against this rule means disappointing and hurting parents’ feelings, explains Kamlesh, whom we recall said that caring for her parents is one of the things her religion prescribes. Vinita, though she describes herself as a non-religious and non-practicing Hindu, has retained what she considers the basic Hindu values of loyalty, love and respect for parents and family.

Somewhat amusingly, I have a handful of informants on record who insist that their own families are more liberal than most other Hindu families they know. “Most of the Indian families I know are from Punjab, and they have really strict parents”, Shanti says.

- Discussing Religion with Others

We saw above that there seems to be a difference between informants’ focus on the collective, and their emphasis on other aspects of Hinduism, beliefs and practices not directly associated with the collective when they talk to Norwegians. I set aside the discussion of what this means, since I explore the issue of explaining Hinduism to others in the chapter called “Reason to Believe”.

Nearly all the interviews contain similar information about how Hindus discuss religion with each other: They don’t! Admittedly, my choice of words may seem a bit hard and fast, but many informants actually tell me that they hardly ever discuss religion with other young Hindus, and that they generally dislike or try to avoid discussing religion with Norwegians and other non-Hindus. One informant told me that the fact that she was going to meet me for an interview prompted her to discuss with her friends, and that this was the first time she had really ever discussed religion with other Hindus. Kavita sums up a general tendency: “I have nearly never discussed things like that [religion] with my Norwegian friends, and with Indian friends we don’t talk about religion when we meet.”

We have now seen examples of the role of the collective in the contexts of religious identity, legitimisation and transmission. We have also seen how important the collective is in beliefs and practices, and we have seen how the collective seems to play a small role when it comes to discussing religion with others. In the following section I explore what the field material can tell us about the role of the individual.

5.3 The Individual

Under the label “individual” I subsume references to and discussions of subjects and themes that are not related to the fellowship of the collective. Examples of such reference are doctrines, personal beliefs, personal practices, personal experiences and feelings and rational understanding. The intention is to exemplify facets of informants’ individual religious experiences. Doctrine and rational understanding are included under this label because they sometimes are an issue in discussions of personal choice in religious affiliation.

Compared to the many references to the collective in the material, references to the individual in the context of religious experience are few. We find scattered mention of private practices like personal prayer, meditation and use of mantras, and some personal rituals. Shubra says that she sometimes chants a mantra if she feels uneasy or has trouble falling asleep, and we remember Vinod who told us about his personal Monday puja for Shiva.

Of the twelve informants, only Kamlesh, Shanti, Kavita, Shubra and Vinita, – all women – offer more than scattered information on the individual in their religious experience. While I make references to all these informants, I have chosen to focus especially on Vinita, since she stands out in her thoughts on the individual and the conclusions she has arrived at regarding her own personal religious quest.

When she was a teenager, Vinita began searching for a Hinduism she could call her own personal Hinduism, a way of making it into something individual. This is something she as an adult still has not found. The interviews with the four other women suggest some kind of inner intuition that can come into play in overcoming cognitive stress, when something is difficult to understand or explain about their religion. This inner orientation also seems to be a source of a religious feeling, or a feeling of faith, leading a life of its own, separately from that part of their religious experience that belongs with the collective. This faith is sometimes subjectively legitimised, as when Shanti says that all she knows about God’s will is what she can feel. Kavita, when talking about teaching her future children about Hinduism, says that when they start to ask for explanations, she will tell them that if what you believe makes you feel good, then it’s right. With these women we find the individual voicing itself as strong personal opinions, an interest in inner motivation and a personal sense of spirituality. Shubra, for example, says that she thinks of herself as a believer, even though she is much less active in observing rituals than her parents.

The other women express similar sentiments. As long as you have an inner faith in something, then that qualifies you as a religious person, in Kavita’s opinion. That’s what it basically means to be a Hindu, she thinks.

As opposed to the other women, Vinita's experience of Hinduism does not offer scope for a personal religious experience, a means of being a "private Hindu", in her own words. Hinduism as a religion has little or no personal appeal to her. With a trace of sarcasm in her voice, she describes it as "a cultural label and a collection of tales about the Gods, something on the same level as Norse mythology".

Vinita's account tells of a person trying to find a way to accommodate her religious heritage with a strong sense of individualism.⁶¹

Vinita: I wanted to make Hinduism into something private, something like the personal, private thing the Christians have. But I couldn't find any way of being a Hindu privately, I couldn't figure out how it would work. The way I felt, it was that I was a Hindu inside. But people didn't buy it. Indians need proof. They have to be able to see that you are a Hindu – that you come to the *Kirtans*. In Hinduism you have to show that you are a Hindu, just like the Catholics when they ask: have you confessed lately?⁶²

Q: Do you think it might be possible to build a private kind of Hinduism if you just gave it some thought?

Vinita: I couldn't. I would be really amazed if somebody did, because as I said, Hinduism is a way of living. It has to be in a context, and that context is other people too. It's get-togethers and all sorts of events. You take it for granted that you pray together. There you have the social aspect. To privatise it, saying you believe in some sort of personal, private Hinduism – I think the idea would make people laugh. It just doesn't belong anywhere.

Q: Your desire to find some kind of a personal Hinduism – do you think it has something to do with an influence from Norwegian culture?

Vinita: Absolutely. I tried to personalise my religion, the Hindu part of myself. But I quickly figured out that without a context you have precious little left... Something I like about Christianity is that you can be Christian in a more private sense. That there is room for it, and that they respect it. That's what I've tried to find for myself, but in Hinduism there is no acceptance for it. Of course there are many Hindus who do Puja alone every day. But there just isn't room for dropping the collective part of it completely so you can be a Hindu to yourself, in your heart. So if you want to run your Hinduism on your own, like a religious one-man enterprise, you still have to be able to demonstrate it. You have to be accepted as a Hindu, and you have to be a part of a context. You have to take your family to the *Kirtans*. You can't just be religious on your own unless people can see that you are religious.

⁶¹ The quote from Vinita is a paraphrase of the actual extract. For the sake of improved readability I have mostly disregarded the convention of using [...].

⁶² In chapter 9, "To Believe or to Do?" I have some quotations from informants with references to how religiosity is related to something you can see.

Many of the ideas that Vinita and the other women express about show a tendency to think of inner motivation and feeling as equal to or more important than ritual observances. These women also depart from what their parents, in my assessment, would emphasise, or traditional ideas of what it means to be religious. But as we saw, this would be no option for Vinita. She had searched for a Hinduism that would let her have a religious experience of her own. Unable to find a way to accomplish this, her response was to discard those religious aspects of Hinduism that could not satisfy her personal needs, and define herself purely as a cultural Hindu.

Apart from diverging both from their parents and the other young adults I talked to, a couple of the female informants that we are discussing also display an apparent ambiguity. Both Shubra and Kamlesh explain the desirability and benefit of being “religious”, i. e. participating in religious gatherings, and doing prayers and rituals. They agree that the more you practise Hinduism, the more of a Hindu you are. But interestingly, in other parts of the interview they also both express the belief that inner persuasion and purity of heart is what really defines you as a religious person and a true Hindu. Each of the women in her own way exhibits a strong individual inclination.

What should we make of this apparent ambiguity? Does it mean that they haven’t made up their minds, that their thinking on the matter is undergoing change? Or does it mean that they, due to cultural influences, are ready to incorporate certain Norwegian ideas given the right circumstances? Maybe the answer is just that they haven’t really thought about it as a problem. In any case we do find among some informants clear signs of an individual orientation in their religious outlook.⁶³ My interpretation is that this orientation is at variance with the more common collective orientation among other informants I have spoken to, and that this orientation is felt most strongly among second-generation informants. If we ask where this tendency comes from, a few informants themselves suggest that they have learned from their parents to listen to an “inner voice”. The general context of Shanti’s interview suggests that her individual orientation is something she has picked up from RE and Philosophy classes in school. Others don’t say very much; but then I did not always ask directly. As I discussed in the introduction to the present chapter, Hinduism harbours an introspective, individual oriented tradition that may account for the individualistic orientation

⁶³ Historian of religion Inger-Anne Bergersen observes from her study of young Pakistani Muslim women a tendency towards increased privatisation in religious practice (Thesis, 2001). N. Ahlberg (1990:243) notes a tendency among Pakistanis in Norway to adjust certain religious practices according to the norms of Norwegian society, i.e. that religion should be more or less a private affair.

among some informants. On the other hand much of what they say strongly resembles the individual orientation found in the Pietistic, Protestant tradition that has shaped much of Norwegian religious culture. From there it is but a short step to argue that influence from Norwegian culture is the cause of the individual orientation among young Hindus, an influence inescapable for children and young people of a small minority which actively pursue integration with their host society.

I think it is an open question whether the cause of the individual orientation should be attributed to personal inclination, parental influence, parts of their own religious tradition or to Western culture. In most cases the answer is probably a combination. All we can really say with certainty is that a strong individual orientation is noticeable in the case of the five women discussed here, and that it in many respects bears a similarity with aspects of Protestant religion in Norway. As a comment on the role of modernity in this respect, I refer to an article by Dube on changes in the Hindu joint family in India. In the article he argues that individualisation and secularisation have, respectively, “adversely affected the group orientation of the joint family...and weakened the ritual norms which contributed so much to the unity of the joint family in the past” (Dube 1978: 231). That individualisation and secularisation can have a similar impact on Hindu families in Norway seems a reasonable assumption.

As an analytical exercise we can divide the individual-collective dichotomy that lies at the basis of this chapter into a finer grid with five separate aspects, each of which are emphasized differently and have different permutations in the case of the individual informants:

1. The individual.
2. The immediate family.
3. Extended family and friends.
4. The larger Hindu community of Norway or the world.
5. The nation-state of India.

For Shanti and Kavita, somewhere in or around number 1 is undoubtedly the most important aspect in their experience of Hinduism. Vinita, one surmises, would have liked to be with Shanti and Kavita, even though she to her disappointment feels that Hinduism mainly is about categories 2 and 3. This is also where the majority of informants would fit. Sushil seems to fit well into numbers four and five. But at the same time it is difficult to place informants squarely into one or the other category, as some or all of the five categories are present in the data from a single informant. In relation to the collective-individual dichotomy, this multi-

pronged perspective brings out in better detail something of the experiential range in religion that is available to informants.

5.4 Conclusion.

From the general picture painted by the material we can conclude that the collective plays an all-important part in the religion of the people I have met. In fact, the significance of the collective is much greater than I had expected it to be before I started analysing the interviews.

As I have explained earlier, the selection I made for my interviews were persons either born or raised in Norway, and who exhibit a high degree of acculturation to Norwegian cultural patterns and values. That also the religion of these persons should show signs of adaptation to their host society seems to be a reasonable assumption, although we cannot say for sure what the reasons for this are. As it happens, my material indicates that adaptation to common Norwegian norms regarding the individual is relatively low. At the same time, especially from some of the women, we gain the impression that individualism is on the rise. Sometimes we detect an uneasy co-existence between individual and collective. But at other times we encounter an assertive, underlying individualistic sub-current that appears to define the total religious experience for those informants. Vinita's views in this connection were especially interesting, we remember, since her critical attitude to Hinduism stems from what she feels is a near-complete lack of cultural and religious resources to draw upon that can satisfy her individualistic temperament.

I introduced at the end of the chapter a multi-pronged grid as an alternative to the dichotomous interpretational strategy presented initially. This suggested how a dichotomous approach could be a pitfall by concealing the composite nature of people's experience of religion.

The next chapter examines the relationship between the notion of Hinduism as a religion specifically for those who inherit it, and the notion of Hinduism as a world religion open to all. How does this work in a context of strong collectivity?

6 WHO CAN BE A HINDU?

Some of my thoughts on Hinduism have changed since you started rolling the tape.

- Shubra

6.1 Introduction

“Hinduism is like Judaism in the sense that you can only be born to be a Hindu”, Sushil says. Traditionally Hinduism does not proselytise, and informants express no need or desire for taking an “evangelising” stance towards non-Hindus. Universalistic ideas that are similar to those in Christianity were launched in what is known as Neo-Hinduism. However, my own reading and observation suggest that to the great majority of Hindus such ideas would seem impossible, or at best unusual.

The theme of this chapter is the tension displayed in the field material between a notion of Hinduism as applicable only for those who are born Hindus, and the idea of Hinduism as a religion for all. Some informants think it is acceptable for a non-Hindu to convert to Hinduism, while some do not. This tension can be described in terms of a dichotomy between universalism and particularism, in religious thinking.

Timothy Fitzgerald proposes a theory that can account for the presence of universalism and particularism in the data, as well as the occasionally evident tension between the two (Fitzgerald 1990:101-118). The main feature of his theory is the analytical distinction between what he calls Dharma 1 and Dharma 2 in Hindu tradition, where Dharma 1 fundamentally relates to a ritual order and collective hierarchy, and is observable as caste. “It is not a system of meaning available for non-Hindus” (p. 113), Fitzgerald says. In this sense it is correct to say that a Hindu is a Hindu because he is a member of a caste, or because he is born of Hindu parents. Dharma 2 comprises the aspect of Hinduism that relates to individual

soteriology and is sectarian rather than caste-based. Sects (*sampradayas*) often display a universalism in their tendency to disregard caste in recruiting members, and emphasise choice, individualism and egalitarianism as opposed to ascribed status (e.g. caste) and duty.

Importantly, Dharma 1 in Fitzgerald's theory is the underlying basic principle of Hinduism. It is the analytical centre of gravity of Hinduism and the context against which Dharma 2 phenomena are rooted and must be understood. This means that when a Dharma 2 type sect moves out from India, it becomes "discontinuous in some important respects with its origins" (p.114). At the same time the theory implies that tendencies of universalism and individualism should not be understood in isolation from Dharma 1 aspects.

Fitzgerald's theory opens for an interpretation of the two aspects of dharma in terms of change and continuity in diaspora Hinduism compared with Hinduism in South Asia. It also provides an insight into the relationship between religious identity as defined by group membership or individual choice. Regarding the question of who can be a Hindu, this chapter will show how a shifting between universalism and particularism in the material can be interpreted in terms of the relationship between the interdependent Dharma 1 and Dharma 2.

6.2 Can A Norwegian Become A Hindu?

All 12 informants were asked: Do you think a Norwegian can become a Hindu? The answers reveal a range of views going from the absolutely negative to the emphatically positive. The following answers represent opposite ends of the scale:

Shubra: Of course a Norwegian can become a Hindu. If you practice Hinduism, then you are a Hindu. It doesn't take much.

Sushil: ...it [conversion] would lead to the dilution of our race.

All statements and answers relating to the theme of conversion are tabulated below according to the following categories: 1) all informants; 2) caste; 3) gender, (tables 1-3). Tabulation according to age and regional origin was deemed irrelevant, due to the small size of the sample, the closeness in age between informants and the non-representative regional composition of the sample. The presentations of tables 1-3 are followed by a discussion of each table individually.

Table 1 - Topic: Can a Norwegian become a Hindu? Responses from all informants:

NO	YES	UNCERTAIN	
5	6	1	Total informants 12

Table 2 - Topic: Can a Norwegian become a Hindu? Responses according to gender:

	NO	YES	UNCERTAIN	TOTAL
Women	1	5	0	6
Men	4	1	1	6

Table 3 - Topic: Can a Norwegian become a Hindu? Responses according to caste:

	NO	YES	UNCERTAIN	TOTAL
Brahmins	2	2	1	5
Other castes	3	4	0	7

- Discussion of Table 1: All Informants

The table tells us that the informants are divided into roughly equal parts on the question of admitting non-Hindus into the Hindu fold. On the basis of observations gathered from conversations with older informants, I conclude that young people are somewhat more open to the possibility of conversion. In my estimate, a similar survey involving first-generation informants is likely to show a majority in disfavour of the possibility of conversion. Referring to the situation in Coventry, Jackson and Nesbitt suggest that the increasing interest in sampradayas (Dharma 2-type sects) and the decreasing role of caste can be related to Fitzgeralds's theory (Jackson and Nesbitt 1993:178). I have no information that points to a corresponding increase in interest in sampradayas in Oslo. Such an interest could potentially be linked with the movement towards more universalism that is apparent in the data. It seems, however, that there is a relative increase in interest in Dharma 2 aspects in Oslo irrespective of any presence of sampradayas.

Setting up categories neatly divided into "yes" and "no" obviously suppresses the variation in informants' responses. Not all informants are unambiguous, with responses ranging from the type "more yes than no" to "perhaps yes, but mainly no" etc. The one person who in table 1 occurs under the column "uncertain" is Arvind, who I included there on the grounds that he seems to contradict himself within the space of the time it took to explain the following:

Q: Is it possible for a person to choose to become a Hindu?

R: No, I don't think so. I think you have to be born a Hindu to be a Hindu.

Q: Is it possible to choose not to be a Hindu?

R: Yes, it's possible, I think. If you don't want to be a Hindu you'll probably have to change your religion, but I think that's difficult.

Personally I can't say that I am not Hindu, because I think it's a fine thing. But if you like, it's also ok if you want to say you're not Hindu.

Q: Can a Norwegian become a Hindu?

R: Yes, that's no problem. When I was in India someone told me you have to be born to it, and that it's very rare that others can be accepted. I thought that was a rather harsh thing to say. But now they have founded a special sect, Hare Krishna. It's mostly Norwegians and British, white people, and I think that's good.

- Discussion of Table 2: Gender

Men and women tend to take diametrically opposing views, where the majority of women say "yes", and most men say "no" to the question of whether a Norwegian can become a Hindu. The tendency is interesting, but on the basis of this small selection we cannot assume a general gender divide on this issue among Hindus in Norway. I have not been able to locate any reports or mention of a connection between gender and attitudes to conversion in other literature. At the time of conducting the interviews the desirability of problematising informants' motivation for their answers did not arise. The data available is therefore not sufficient to offer more than a few tentative and propositional explanations for this apparent gender divide. Certain traits of Hinduism can nevertheless add some light to the question. Ethnographical introductions to Hinduism occasionally describe gender differences in roles, duties and outlook. Women play a central role in the perpetuation of tradition within the family. Apparently underlining the role of women in perpetuating tradition, two male informants said, verbatim echoing each other: "Mother is superstitious" (Interviews 2 and 3). Sometimes I have heard Hindu men explain (especially men above middle age), maybe a little indulgently, that their wives are more religious than they are. Young men may refer to their elderly women folk in the same way. The afore-mentioned Rakshabandhan ritual is but one example of gender based ritual differentiation. Many informants, especially first-generation, also tell me about many customs that only the wives observe. These examples are a pointer to the presence of further differences in the religious and social roles of men and women in Hindu tradition.⁶⁴ I will in the following explore how these can account for the tendencies in table 2.

⁶⁴Nesbitt contends that gender is significant in the religious involvement of Hindu children in Coventry (Nesbitt 1993).

Broadly speaking, many of women's ritual and religious responsibilities are centred on and delimited by the family and the home, whereas many of men's responsibilities are oriented towards the boundaries between the family unit and other people. For example, in connection with marriage, a man and a woman are inclined to take different stances on the consequences of marriage outside the Hindu community or the caste. From a man's point of view, a Norwegian wife potentially represents the danger of divorce and ensuing social instability. She is unlikely to be a virgin before marriage and also unlikely to conform to ideals he may have been brought up with regarding wifely behaviour, above all for example, in relation to her in-laws. She probably will insist on keeping her own surname, or even wish that their children combine the surnames of both parents. In a tradition where passing on the family name is accorded high importance, such latitude in selecting surnames is undesirable. All these scenarios represent a threat against a man's social status and honour in his community and his duty to pass on his line. For a man to cross boundaries between communities in marriage may threaten his honour and lead to undesirable reactions in his own community. His children face the possibility of not being considered fully Hindus either by members of his family or by other Hindus, and therefore not qualified to pass on the tradition and the family line. I asked Vinod why he thought Hindus were against mixed marriages, and he said that some Hindus think that people with mixed backgrounds can be potential traitors to the Hindu community. A Hindu woman, according to my observations, is likely to be less concerned with the same kind of formalities as a man. Shanti is not concerned about the religious identity of her own children in case she marries a Norwegian:

I would be concerned about them [my children] being raised with Indian values. But to say that they should be Hindus would be a too detailed demand. But regarding my own parents and relatives, I know they would be concerned about them being brought up to follow Indian values. Here I think that maybe boys and girls think differently. Boys are more logical in their thinking about things like this, but for girls it's less complicated, I think. I guess that's why boys are more against marriage to non-Hindus.

Traditionally the responsibility and authority over a girl passes from her family to her in-laws upon marriage. To a Hindu girl, a Norwegian husband may represent more personal freedom compared to marrying into an Indian family.⁶⁵ On the down side of it, a Hindu woman in the event of divorce faces potentially stronger negative sanctions from her community than a man would. "But you can't think so far ahead", Shanti says. From the United States DasGupta and

⁶⁵ Supported by observations by social anthropology student Anita Jarl who has conducted fieldwork among young Hindu women in Oslo (thesis forthcoming, University of Oslo).

DasGupta report: “More and more young women of Indian descent complain that they are unable to find a partner within the community who is supportive and encouraging of their independence, assertiveness, activism, and ambition” (DasGupta and DasGupta 1996:382). Talking about her own Norwegian boy friend, Vinita says that her Indian female friends are “intensely curious about him. They keep talking to him, asking him questions of all kinds and it’s as if they’re dying just to touch him.”

Discussing what they believe is a higher incidence of outmarriage⁶⁶ among Indian American females compared with their male counterparts, the DasGupta mother and daughter team cite researchers Sue and Morishima: “...Asian American men [i.e. not including South Asians] may be inhibited from doing the same [i.e. outmarrying] by ‘family pressures, the necessity to carry on the family name, ‘saving face’, and physical height.’” (DasGupta and DasGupta 1996:395)⁶⁷ I presented the findings from my field material to Sushil, and asked what he thought is the explanation for the gender divide in my material. Rather spontaneously he exclaimed: “That the girls want to marry a white man, and then they want him to be a Hindu too! Those are my immediate thoughts, without having reflected much on it.” Shanti, when presented with the same information for a comment said: “Maybe it’s because they [the girls] have a Norwegian boy friend? In any case conversion is possible. It’s no problem to become a Hindu, I think.” Kamlesh, whose love-marriage to a Norwegian initially led to deep conflict with her parents, says she likes to believe that anybody can become a Hindu.

It seems reasonable to assume that the marked difference between men and women regarding proselytisation can be linked to the structuring of gender roles, a difference which particularly shows up in connection with marriage. The DasGuptas refer to studies that point to a generally higher degree of accommodation to new cultural values and ideas among Asian women compared to men. According to the DasGuptas, South Asian women in North America display a higher degree of interest and tolerance towards values such as gender equality and community participation than their male counterparts, while at the same time there is evidence of an “increased vigilance against exogamy of girls” (DasGupta and DasGupta 1996:382-386). Anita Jarl whom I have referred to in a note earlier, informs me that several of her female first-generation informants said that their husbands were less open to Norwegian cultural values than themselves.⁶⁸

⁶⁶ Reliable statistics are not yet available, according to the authors (per 1996).

⁶⁷ Citing from Sue, S. and J.K. Morishima 1982.

⁶⁸ In personal communication

To sum up, it appears that second-generation women in diaspora tend to incline towards individual choice, and men towards upholding of tradition and caste values. The differences can be related to Fitzgerald's model, where Dharma 2 aspects seem to appeal more to women than to men among informants. These aspects will in some respects coincide with host society cultural and religious values, and may be reinforced by them.

The systematic presence of gender differences in the Hindu tradition, as discussed above, indicates that the results presented in table 2 can be understood in light of the broader tradition. On the other hand, countering these observations, is a statistical study by Siddiqi and Reeves which show that Indian men in the US attach less importance to caste and religion in marriage than do women (Siddiqi and Reeves 1986:228-230). Further investigation is needed to assess the relationship between South Asian gender models and host society cultural influences regarding gender roles.

- Discussion of Table 3: Caste

As shown in table 3 the material does not indicate a correlation between caste and views on proselytisation. Yet seeing Hinduism as an ascribed social identity in conjunction with an understanding of the caste system can nevertheless offer an explanatory perspective on the Hindu resistance to conversion. An important characteristic of the caste system is that castes should not be mixed, above all in connection with marriage.⁶⁹ Another feature is a notion that each community should and naturally will keep to its own ways according to its nature. But in practice the content and actual application of rules that regulate conduct or inhibit contact between different castes can vary considerably depending on context, locality and the individuals involved.

Caste was not a theme that I particularly focused upon during the interview sessions and the theme invites further research. Observations gathered from the fieldwork nevertheless indicate that caste generally has relatively little significance among Hindus in Norway.⁷⁰ Still,

⁶⁹Kim Knott observes that marriage involving difference in caste or regional origin is rare among Hindus in Leeds (Knott 1986:44), whereas Nesbitt some ten years later records from Coventry that her informants report an increase in the number of intercaste marriages among both Hindus and Sikhs (Nesbitt 1997:213). S.D. Devasia writes that most first-generation Indians in West Germany are married to Germans. The author does not indicate what this information is based upon (Devasia 1993:398).

⁷⁰It should be noted that caste is but one aspect (although central) of South-Asian notions on status and hierarchy. A relatively low awareness or significance of caste (that is: caste as rules on commensality and endogamy, ritual purity or power relations) in some social contexts does not necessarily involve a corresponding low awareness of other aspects of status and hierarchy in other contexts or in general. My own observations suggest that for first-generation immigrants status and hierarchy can often be an important component in social relations, both among fellow Indians and with Norwegians. A study of the inter-cultural dynamic between South-

one can often detect a sensitivity to the potential for the conflict-generating aspects of caste.⁷¹ For this reason, for example, in an interview the priest of the Hindu temple in Slemmestad asked me not to refer to him as the local “Brahmin”, but as the “resident priest” of the temple. The data from the fieldwork interviews suggests a correlation between caste rank and awareness of caste. Brahmin informants clearly display a higher degree of caste-awareness than informants from other castes. When questioned about caste, informants from Brahmin families (five out of the twelve Fieldwork 2 informants) as a rule replied with confidence about their caste background. Non-Brahmin informants would typically be hesitant, often expressing uncertainty or even ignorance. Some said they never talked about it at home, like Shanti, who said she didn’t know she was from a Kshatriya caste until a relative told her last time she visited India. Tushar had to ask his father during our interview and learned that his family was Aurora caste. A couple of first-generation informants told me that caste meant little in their own families, but that they knew about “other” families where caste was an issue in connection with marriage.⁷² Some of my informants who are parents (Fieldwork 1) said they would not mind if their children married a Norwegian, although it “would be preferable” for them to marry an Indian. Whether the apparently low emphasis on caste can be explained by a concern for political correctness was not explored during my interviews. Even so my observations over time among North-Indians suggest the possibility that a two-tier division between Brahmins and non-Brahmins is emerging. Other scholars report similar tendencies. Jackson and Nesbitt report from the UK a tendency among Hindu children that any sense of caste hierarchy relates to the Brahmins and the lowest castes (Jackson and Nesbitt 1993:35). Taking Trinidad as his main example, S. Vertovec says that a disintegration of the caste system is taking place in countries with South Asian populations descended from indentured labourers, and that only the extreme ends of the caste scale sometimes count in allocating social status (Vertovec 1989:168, 169). In Dutch Surinam a similar structure seems to have evolved (cf. van der Burg 1991:217). According to Helen Kanitkar the tendency among Hindus in Britain and elsewhere in dispersal is that the four varnas⁷³ retain relevance at the expense of sub-caste membership (H. Kanitkar 1981:95). The afore-mentioned study by Siddiqi and Reeves from the United States (1986:231) concludes that caste plays a diminished

Asian notions of hierarchy, separated from caste, in relationship to the egalitarianism of Norwegian society, would seem to be an interesting topic for research.

⁷¹ Writing about caste among overseas Indians, Helen A. Kanitkar observes: “...a caste consciousness still remains and operates. Caste stereotypes and the prejudice that accompanies them simmer just below the surface in social intercourse...” (A. Kanitkar 1981:94).

⁷² In Breisteinslien two informants explain that caste has little significance for them in Norway, except in connection with marriage (Breisteinslien 1987:42, 51).

⁷³ See Glossary at the end.

role in the context of marriage. The trend of simplification of the caste hierarchy, or a diminished significance of caste, as reported by the scholars cited above, is modified by Rachel Dwyer's study on Gujarati Hindus in Britain: "[The local caste hierarchy] has given rise to a set of sub-divisions even more elaborate than those seen elsewhere in India" (R. Dwyer 1996:169).

My discussion on the possibility of a Norwegian converting into Hinduism has been from the perspective of one parameter at the time, either caste or gender. It would be interesting to triangulate the relationship between caste, gender and views on conversion. My field material for this sort of correlation is too small, but if we confine ourselves to the five Brahmin informants, we find that Brahmin men tend to be more conservative than Brahmin women (see table 4 below).

Table 4 - Views on conversion of Norwegians according to gender and caste; Brahmins:

	NO	YES	UNCERTAIN	TOTAL
Brahmin men	2	0	1	3
Brahmin women	0	2	0	2

6.3 More obstacles to conversion

I have now focused on gender and caste in a discussion on the issue of who can be a Hindu. Certain data in the material suggest the existence of deeper thought structures that shape people's thinking on the issue. I shall briefly glance at this data. The discussion centres on informants' criteria for defining a Hindu, and how notions of unique essence and hierarchy can be obstacles for accepting others into the Hindu community.

- The Criteria

Kavita thoughtfully raised the question: "Who is a Hindu?" And Kamlesh, whom we remember said she likes to believe that anybody can become a Hindu, asks: "But what is a real Hindu? What is a pure Hindu?" Other informants follow a similar line of questioning in the interviews. The questions often remained unanswered. Some explicitly say that they do not know what criteria to go by. One sometimes gets the impression that interviewees were searching for new ways of identifying a Hindu, notably in terms other than ascribed status. That young Hindus themselves are in search of an identity obviously does not make easier for them to figure out if a Norwegian wanting to become a Hindu can do so. Shanti thinks

conversion is possible. Still, she does not know where a prospective convert might seek advice on how to effect a conversion. She thinks her father would laugh at the idea. Kavita is well aware of the traditional notion of birth of Hindu parents as a prerequisite for Hindu identity. Yet she expresses an uneasiness about it which is not elaborated beyond explaining that she does not know what criteria people use for saying someone is Hindu. Shubra is surer and is convinced that belief is what counts. Birth does not make any difference. But then Shubra elsewhere also says it is the practice of Hinduism that defines a Hindu. And again Kamlesh, who prefers to think of Hinduism as an open religion, remarks that according to the tradition practice is not enough: “I wish everyone welcome, but I hear what people say that you can never become a real Hindu”, she says, while adding that even if you outdo a Hindu in observing Hindu practices, you can at best only approach Hinduism. Vinod, to the same effect, says: “I would have to be honest if someone asked me [how to become a Hindu] and tell him that he cannot become completely a Hindu. But he can live as a Hindu and get a certain amount of acceptance.”

- *Essence*

Kamlesh raises the question of what makes a pure Hindu, while Vinod says only a certain degree of acceptance is possible. One may interpret what these informants say as suggestive of a presence of a certain kind of discourse based on a premise of the possibility of and/or the givenness of purity. Does this mean that a notion of unique essence is important to Hindus?⁷⁴ The question seems relevant in the context of Kamlesh’s viewpoint that it is not possible to become a Hindu, but that it is possible for a non-Hindu to gradually approach Hinduism through his acts. How is such a unique essence transmitted, then? One answer is supplied by a Gujarati family man: “You have to be born into the religion. *You can’t become another person*. You can’t come from another religion and become a Hindu” (Fieldwork 1; my italics). Hindu identity, as indicated by this quote, consists in partaking in a unique essence that can be shared only by those who are born into a Hindu community. Burghart (1987:231-233) rather forcefully argues that in Britain Hinduism is evolving into an ethnic religion – a religion for a particular people. This argument is partly based on his interpretation of the

⁷⁴ This is suggested by Marriott in connection with his discussion of his term “code-substance” (Marriott 1976:109,10): See also Marriott and Inden 1973: “Towards an Ethnosociology of Hindu Caste”.

contents of a pamphlet prepared by The National Council of Hindu Temples (NCHT)⁷⁵, and which seeks to explain Hinduism to a British audience as “India’s timeless spiritual culture”.

Literature on Hinduism is filled with discussions of purity and pollution in Hinduism. Dumont is one scholar who argues for the notion of degrees of purity, that is the principle of non-mixing of social categories, as the underlying principle for classification of caste and fundamental marker of social identity. Available data in the interviews indicates that purity as unique essence is positively actualised in connection with discourse on social identity. Informants who lean towards acceptance of converts as genuine Hindus are frequently also in doubt. It seems reasonable to explain such doubts by the persistence of the idea of a unique essence that can be transmitted only by birth.

The seesaw movement between universalism and particularism may also be illuminated by Fitzgerald’s theory, which says that Dharma 2 is rooted in Dharma 1.

- Hierarchy

If a group of people share a unique essence, does it follow that other people are essentially different and can be ranked accordingly? Scattered field data suggests that some informants believe this to be the case to varying extents. Information on the theme emerges when informants are asked if there is something they think Hindus could learn from Christians, or if there is something they would like to change in their own religion. Several times the reply takes the form of a criticism against parents who informants think are arrogant in the unequal way they treat other people, especially people from other religions. Sometimes the criticism is directed towards Hinduism in a more general fashion. Vinod thinks that one difference between Hinduism and Christianity is the greater openness of the latter. About Christianity he says:

Everybody is equal, and God receives everybody, even if they are sinners. In Hinduism there is a big difference in how you get treated depending on your caste, and what you are supposed to do in relation to God and religion. Christianity accepts people. Other people are more welcome among Christians.

Judging from Vinod’s description, it appears that hierarchy is another obstacle a prospective convert to Hinduism might have difficulties in overcoming.

⁷⁵ Pamphlet is entitled: *An introduction to the World’s Oldest Living Religion*, and has a foreword by the President of the NCHT which is dated 1983.

6.4 Can a Hindu Convert?

The majority of my informants do not think others can convert into Hinduism. But curiously *all* informants think that a Hindu may convert into something else! How do we explain the logic of this? For a comment, I turned to Sushil, who is a well-read humanities student:

I think the explanation is very simple. History... People are used to the idea of Hindus being converted by Christians and Muslims... That Hinduism does not convert from other religions I think is a self-imposed image. Historically Hindus in fact did convert when they migrated into areas [in the Subcontinent] populated by other peoples, perhaps with a looser kind of theology or philosophy. They call it absorption.⁷⁶ Hindus have converted hundreds of thousands of tribals. But when the Parsis and the Christians and the Jews arrived, Hindus just left them alone because they possessed a strong religion in their own right that couldn't be absorbed just like that. Since they were few in numbers they also posed no threat. This all changed when the Muslims came. They came to rule. And they wanted to convert people. So Hindus reacted by turning inwards. The strategy was to fence themselves in.

While informants exhibit no desire or interest in converting to Christianity, some say they would count Jesus as a God. I asked Shanti how she thought her family would react were she to convert:

It would hardly make any difference for me regarding my family. I hardly know which rules you have to follow as a Hindu, so if I were a Christian or a Hindu couldn't make much of a difference. Hindus for example don't eat beef, but in my family we do. As long as you don't proclaim it [that you are Christian] out loud all the time it could hardly make any difference.

Kamlesh explains that the core of Hinduism is to do good deeds, and when I inquire if not this is the aim of all religion, she says: "Yes, and in that sense I might as well be Christian or Muslim...".

6.5 Inter-Faith Dialogue

V.P. Kanitkar discusses the state of inter-faith dialogue among Hindus in Britain, and asks:

Why don't Hindus try to convert other people to their faith? He explains this by referring to a "self-contained religious insularity" among Hindus that has led to what he calls "the 'live-

⁷⁶An ability to absorb and incorporate foreign religious ideas is commonly pointed out in text books and introductions to Hinduism as an example of a perceived innate tolerance in Hinduism. Criticizing this notion, P. Hacker argues that this tolerance rather should be understood as what he terms "inclusivism", which considers foreign systems as "lower stages of one's own religious system, thus included in it" (Hacker: *Kleine Schriften*, p. 482 quoted in Halbfass 1988:370). For a further discussion of Hacker's "inclusivism" term, see Halbfass 1988:370ff and ch. 22.

and-let-live' and 'separate-but-equal' attitudes of Hindus towards different sects within Hinduism as well as towards other faiths." He further explains:

Hindus will not deny the validity of another religion, but they will not feel any need to find out about it either...most Hindus tend to lack curiosity about belief and patterns of worship in other religions and are rarely interested in holding a dialogue with the followers of other faiths...Very few, if any, Hindus will be able to distinguish between different churches or to describe from first-hand experience the services held on Sundays, even after a life-time in Britain. They are not against other faiths; they simply feel that they do not need to know how non-Hindus worship God (V.P. Kanitkar 1993:114,115).

An observation by Jagat Motwani seems to support Kanitkar: "The Indian experiences [sic] in many countries...suggest the tendency of cultural aloofness from the mainstream" (Motwani 1993:6). To what extent does my material reflect similar sentiments? Vinita seems to echo Motwani's assessment in a criticism of what she thinks of as cultural escapism among Hindus: "You can't live just with your own cultural package and keep contact with Norwegians only when you have to. That's no good". Kavita shares an opinion with many informants in thinking that Hinduism is open and liberal. She adds that she may have developed this impression after living in Norway.

- Christians and Christianity

In contrast with the observations of Kanitkar and Motwani, the Jackson and Nesbitt (1996:147) pair observe that among young Hindus in the UK "...stories and aspects of Christian practice and custom...[can sometimes] be absorbed into personal and family life without being a threat to it." From my own fieldwork I have several first-generation informants on record telling me that they have been to church services, sometimes in connection with Christmas. "After all, God is God. *Mandir*, church or mosque is the same", a retired bus-driver (Fieldwork 1) explains. A first-generation Bengali informant (Fieldwork 1) said he would not object to participating in Holy Communion if he happened to be present. This person describes his wife and himself as non-religious Hindus. Kavita says that her family keeps an image of Jesus in their family shrine. She believes what she learned from Sunday School: God is in her heart and that this is where her inner voice comes from.

Breisteinslien (1987:41,42) describes a couple who read to the children both from the Bible and the Gita for Christmas. This couple usually visits Lutheran services. By way of compensating for the lack of a Hindu priest, the husband and wife had their newborn children blessed in the local Lutheran church before performing the traditional naming ceremony

(*namkarana*) at home with Norwegian and Indian friends present. Like the majority of informants, this family has no connection to any particular sect or tradition, and professes little knowledge of the philosophical aspects of Hinduism. The couple agree, however, that marriage should be within the caste.

Many parents (Fieldwork 1) tell me that they would not object to their children participating in Church-organised activities, such as boy scouts, and some say that they would encourage their children to participate in such activities. “This is much better than having them go to parties where there are boys and drinking”, a Brahmin father said, referring specifically to his teen-age daughter (Fieldwork 1). Some first-generation informants tell me that they are well acquainted with Christians from India since they were educated at Christian schools. Their first-hand knowledge of Christians may in some cases explain why informants appear to be so open and relaxed regarding Christianity. A couple of fathers told me that they in their youth had received financial assistance from either Christian educational institutions or missionaries, “with no strings attached”, in the words of one.

Kamlesh relates what it was like being a member of the local gospel choir in an Oslo suburb:

I don't know what it's like to be a Christian, since I've never been a hundred percent Christian. But I have seen what Church is like. I used to sing in a gospel choir. Every single Christmas Eve I participated in ushering in Christmas in the gospel choir at the local church. Mommy and Daddy went to church every Christmas Eve.

Of interest here is the parallel attitude between the Bergen couple described by Breisteinslien (1987) and the description Kamlesh gives of her parents in my data. Both show a distinctive openness towards Christian religious activities while also believing that marriage should be restricted to within the caste.

Even if one does not actively choose to participate in church activities as Kamlesh did, all Hindu children have a chance to experience a church from the inside during the annual school services held just before Christmas. Excepting the extremely rare case where parents object on the basis of religion, class excursions will include also any Hindus in the class. More than half of the informants have followed the general religious education classes through part or their entire grade school career. In the case of parental objection, schools offered religiously neutral ethics classes as an option.⁷⁷ Despite the fairly strong exposure and frequent access to information about Christianity, most informants display a relatively low

⁷⁷ This option has recently been discontinued due to reforms in the subject of Religious Education, which recently was modified into a new and compulsory subject intended to be religiously neutral.

degree of factual knowledge about Christianity. This assessment nevertheless requires qualification on the basis of comparative data on such knowledge among average Norwegians. Not all Norwegians can be assumed to be well versed about Christianity either, even if this religion is the dominant religion of the land.⁷⁸ Kavita, a Brahmin, participated in the general religious education classes throughout her school years and was even sent by her parents to Sunday school. She gives the following explanation to why Jesus died on the cross: “He was hung on the cross – but just why – I knew it once. He was punished for something.” Shanti says: “...I have a vague explanation, but I don’t know exactly why. He died for the people. There was a message behind it all.”

Hindus frequently portray their religious tradition as very open and tolerant. It can be difficult for the researcher to assess whether information given by informants about church visits and attitudes to Christians is the result of a wish on their part to come across as open and tolerant. My impression is that going to church has become more rare among adult Hindus in the Oslo area after the temple in Slemmestad was established.

Occasionally informants feel that Christianity can be intolerant and even overtly strict. They are particularly critical towards the Christian tradition of proselytising. This does not reflect an antipathy towards Christian doctrines as such, though the general tone is that informants do not feel there is much to be learned from Christianity. An exception is Sushil, who says that he for a short period was attracted to Protestantism:

What I liked was the notion that Jesus takes on all our sins. It creates a great sense of freedom that you can get forgiveness when you’ve done wrong, just by surrendering to Jesus, that you can believe in God and not have to feel bound...It’s a liberation from the straight-jacket of Hinduism.

- Non-Christian Religions

The general openness towards Christianity and its institutions is not paralleled by a similar attitude towards Islam. Criticisms against Islam are considerably stronger than those directed at Christianity. Informants often believe that the religion of Pakistanis is very strict, more demanding and decidedly less open and tolerant than their own. The reserve that their parent’s generation (Fieldwork 1) exhibits regarding Islam is, however, not shared to the same degree

⁷⁸ Pål Repstad has written extensively on the sociology of religion in Norway. See for instance Repstad 1996: *Religiøst liv i det moderne Norge. Et sosiologisk kart*. Kristiansand: Norwegian Academic Press/Høyskoleforlaget.

by the younger generation. Shanti says her parents are worried that she should spend time with and make friends among Pakistanis:

They [the parents] think it's different if I make friends with Norwegians and others, for example from China or the Philippines and other Asian countries... This has to do with their background. After all there has always been conflict between Hindus and Muslims in India.

I must stress that some informants, both first- and second generation, stress that they have nothing against Islam and that they also have Muslim friends.

Buddhism is casually mentioned by nearly half of informants as a religion that has much to teach and which is close to Hinduism. The main source of information on Buddhism is school. Both Buddhism and Hinduism are described by different informants as "liberal", "old", "ethical", "spiritual". According to Shubra they share a focus on man's inner being rather than on what God says or what you should do. "Broadly speaking", Vinita says, "Buddhism is the same as Hinduism but with all the nonsense and the Gods removed."

References to Sikhism are scarce and very brief. This is somewhat unexpected since Sikhs comprise more than half of the Indian population in Norway. Only one informant specifically mentions that he has a Sikh friend.

- Views about Other Hindu Sects

Informants often mention the ISKCON sect (commonly known as the "Hare Krishnas") when discussing conversion, and the sect is given as an example of non-Hindus who have become Hindus. Attitudes that I have noted among informants vary from a certain amount of condescension, to curious surprise at their achievements and sometimes respect. Sushil flatly states that "they are wanna-be Hindus" whereas Tushar thinks they have done "a good job". A retired librarian (Fieldwork 1) told me he thought Hindus should learn from the Hare Krishnas in how they study Hinduism and the sacred texts. "They know Hinduism better than we do", he thinks. Shanti dislikes the way they constantly go around advertising and making a big fuss about their religion, whereas Gopal and a couple of others are unsure if they can be counted as Hindus. The "Hare-Rama-Hare-Krishnas", as informants occasionally refer to the sect, are sometimes seen to consist of "foreigners". I have never observed more than a small handful of South Asians among those present at some of the ISKCON functions that I have attended in

Oslo. This contrasts with the situation in Great Britain, where ISKCON has attracted a substantial following among South Asians.⁷⁹

Other organised sectarian and sectarian-like traditions in Oslo are the Swami Narayan sect and the VHP. Followers of the Swami Narayan sect are found in the small Gujarati community, which arrived in Norway as refugees from Idi Amin's Uganda. Many maintain networks with the international Swami Narayan movement.⁸⁰ Among Punjabi Hindus (comprising the majority of North Indians in this country) a family connection with the Arya Samaji tradition is not uncommon, though the sect has no independently organised presence in Oslo.

6.6 Discussing Religion

Young Hindus rarely discuss religion among themselves, as I earlier noted. This usually applies to their interaction with Norwegians as well. As Gopal says: "I have not discussed much religion with Norwegians...the little religion I have discussed has been with my parents." To my question about the extent to which she discusses religion with Norwegian friends, Shubra responds:

We never really discuss religion. I don't like to discuss religion, because it brings up so much personal stuff. A lot of people are very touchy when it comes to religion. There is a lot of strong feeling among Norwegians, the Christians. That's why I never discuss it. But I can tell some to them, and they can tell some to me. But we never debate it, because it's so personal, and every person has his personal opinions about religion.

It seems that young Hindus try to avoid discussing religion at work and school, and are positively reluctant to debate whether their religion is better than other religions. Yet this does *not* necessarily mean that they do not think so! Sushil thinks the reason why Hindus are so reluctant to discuss their religion is that "they hardly know anything about it." A feature that attracts attention is that some interviewees say they are selective about whom they enter into conversation with. They explain that a willingness to discuss Hinduism with Norwegians

⁷⁹ According to Bimal Krishna Das, Public Relations Officer for the ISKCON temple in Watford and Secretary to The National Council of Hindu Temples, UK (personal communication May 1999). This is supported by Carey 1987:89.

⁸⁰ About 300 or so persons (according to my informants from this community) arrived in Norway in 1972 and 1973 and settled mainly in the Eastern county of Østfold. Further reading, see Tambs-Lyche (1980), or Jacobsen (2001).

depends on the outcome of an evaluation of the personality of the inquirer. The quote from Arvind is a typical example:

Q: How would you argue to a Christian that your religion is good?

R: It depends what kind of personality he has. If he is wise he can understand what's in the religion, but if he is a fool I would avoid discussing with him. It's no use spending time on somebody who doesn't understand what it is. In that case it's better to say that Christianity is best, even though I know what's in Christianity and Hinduism. It's better to take good things from both religions than to prove it's [Hinduism] is best.

6.7 Conclusion

In the present chapter I pose the question: who can be a Hindu? There are various views on this question among my second-generation informants, with women tending to be more liberal than the men. The general image of Brahmins as being more conscious of caste identity than non-Brahmins suggests that Brahmin informants would likely be more resistant to accepting converts. The field material shows no positive evidence in support this assumption, however. The question of why men and women differ on the issue of universalism invites further investigation.

I have not attempted to discuss to what extent the presence of traits such as universalism are the result of Norwegian cultural influences or to internal developments in Hindu tradition. Fitzgerald's theory opens to the possibility of considering universalistic notions in diaspora Hinduism not as an adaptation to host society cultural notions, but as the result of a shift in emphasis within the framework of the tradition and founded upon its own cultural resources. This is made possible by proposing an analytical distinction between two aspects within Hindu tradition, Dharma 1 and Dharma 2. Dharma 2 features such as universalism, individualism and disregard for ritual and caste are primarily linked to the Hindu sectarian tradition.

As far as I have been able to judge, there does not seem to be a strong influence from sectarian traditions or organisations prevalent among first and second-generation informants in Oslo, excepting perhaps the Gujarati community. This leads us to expect a preponderance of the non-sectarian Dharma 1-type Hinduism among informants. My observations indicate that this is the case. Even so many Dharma 2 features are also in evidence. Sometimes the tendency is clearly manifest, at times only tentatively, but frequently intermixed and co-existing with traditional Dharma 1 features. Linking Dharma 2 features closely to sect therefore does seem to fit too well with the situation in Oslo, since I have not been able to

observe a strong presence of sects during my fieldwork. It is possible that were Neo-Hindu ideas or perhaps internationally connected sampradhyas to gain a foothold amongst Hindus in Norway, a clearer Dharma 2 profile will in time develop. As I have suggested earlier, fledgling Dharma 2 notions (such as universalism and individualism) are likely to be reinforced and legitimised due to a similarity with cultural values of the host society. It seems prudent here to qualify my attempts at a forecast by stressing that a strengthening of Dharma 2 features does not necessarily imply a universalism that envelopes other religions, but one that confines itself to the broader Hindu community. Universalism in this sense can be an ecumenical force for dialogue and merging of identities among Hindus of different regional and ritual affiliations.

Regarding inter-faith dialogue we find a mixture of openness and indifference. Informants may readily participate in Christian practices and allow them in their own families. While being involved with Christian institutions, many at the same time display a lack of interest in any deeper dialogue with Christians about religious values and doctrines. Regarding views and attitudes to other religions, Islam tends to be singled out with an attitude towards this religion of some reserve. My general impression is that Hindus often prefer not to discuss religion with others if they can avoid it.

It appears that the data on attitudes to other religions both support and negate the observations that were quoted from Kanitkar, especially where he says that "...[Hindus] feel that they do not need to know how non-Hindus worship God."

In the introduction to this chapter I mentioned how Christianity and Hinduism differ in their attitudes to proselytisation. In this respect the separation between religious doctrine and culture can be a resource for Christian proselytising activities directed at non-Christian peoples. The next chapter, "Apart from Religion", examines the relationship between religion and other cultural activities in the world of my informants.

7 APART FROM RELIGION

*If you want to keep the culture, then you also got to be interested in the religion.
And the other way round, too.*

- Tushar

7.1 Introduction

A feature of many South Asian cosmologies are that they operate within a conceptual universe that does not make distinctions between that which pertains to religion and that which pertains to other categories, such as custom, nation, and art. These are some aspects of reality that in Western thought tend to be distinguished as separate ontological categories. Among Hindus these aspects are often not distinguished in the same absolute way. My analytical stance is that this feature among Hindus can be explained by the low degree of such distinction in dharma. It is in this sense that I earlier referred to dharma as the “underlying conceptual framework” of Hinduism.

Among my diaspora informants, however, there seems to be a tendency towards a fragmentation of this monistic universe. I argue that this tendency comprises a shift in the conceptualisation of religion among Hindus, a process that I describe as “De-linking”.

In the first section of the present chapter I discuss the actual thoughts of the informants. The second section is a comparison of South Asian and Western thought in this regard based on what some scholars have written on the subject. In the third section I sketch an outline for approaching a discussion of how and why de-linking occurs.

7.2 Discussion of Fieldwork

In chapter No. 5 (“We Hindus and I”) we saw how the relationship between religion and collectivity is so close that they seem to overlap, so as to be nearly indistinguishable. For example, we remember Tushar who said: “[R]eligious meetings are just an excuse for people to get together socially.” My data indicates that this pattern of overlap applies for other categories as well as the collective. Yet the data also shows evidence of fragmentation, which ties in with the observation by Jackson and Nesbitt among Hindu children in Coventry: “...[A] line is increasingly apparent dividing the everyday, secular and Western from the special, religious and Indian.” (1993:70; see also p. 179.)

There are two tendencies in the data which I have chosen to label the “linked” and the “de-linked” tendencies. Though the linked tendency does seem to dominate in the interviews, the focus of the discussion of the chapter is on the latter tendency. I propose that the occurrence of de-linking is evidence of a shift in the conceptualisation of religion among informants.

A close link between religion and a very broad range of categories and activities is suggested throughout the field data. Indeed, categories like family, art, tradition, nation, and daily life at times are so closely linked with religion in the discourse of my informants that they virtually seem to coalesce with religion. This is similar to the connection we saw between religion and collective. Vinita is one informant who is very conscious of the connection between religion and other activities. I asked her once about what she thought were important differences between Hinduism and Christianity. She explained how Hinduism seems to mesh with aspects of daily life in ways that Christianity does not:

I think that Hinduism expresses itself much more in the daily life of a Hindu than Christianity does in the daily life of a Christian. This touches upon how Hinduism is a way of life. A Hindu sees signs and portents and symbols everywhere – he encounters his faith much more in daily life than a Christian does. I have lived in this country for...years now, and only once have I ever seen a car with a cross on it – I’m not counting the occasional funeral car. And that was a car which was parked outside the Faculty of Theology! But in India you’ll see Om and Krishna and Shiva on cars all over the place.

Sushil, whose language often reveals academic training, seems to be aware of linkage within the concept dharma: “Just like Sharia is a synthesis of religion and society, so dharma is the same for Hindus.”

The characteristics of deities in Hinduism, as described by the informant Arvind, are a more implicit indication of the close relationship between religion and other parts of life.

Arvind explains that the millions of gods of Hinduism “are meant to give us humans role models for all kinds of situations”, and names the gods for war, sports, love, music, knowledge, family, strength. In one statement Shubra, who when she was younger used to enjoy performing in a group for classical Indian dance, links narrative, dance and Hinduism. I asked her: “What do Ram and Krishna mean to you?” This is her reply:

I don’t have any personal relationship to them, except that I like hearing the stories about them. I think it’s great fun. It’s so huge, and there’s so much to learn. The moral content of the stories really have a lot to do with ordinary life. But besides that, and besides that I dance quite a lot about them, I don’t have a personal relationship to them. But maybe that’s personal enough.

Vinita participated in the same dance group as Shubra did. Yet independently of Shubra, she seems to draw a very similar picture, sprinkled with memories of childhood fun:

I used to love all the dances about Shiva and Radha, and how Shiva stabbed all the evil spirits. They never had any religious significance to me, though. They were just Hindu stories. But it was such great fun, because I was inside the stories, and we were Krishna, we pretended we were the gods.

Perhaps the reader feels that I am over-interpreting Shubra and Vinita’s statements. Yet in support of my line of argument the reader may recall the tabus and daily-life rituals that were briefly mentioned earlier, such as the tabu against clipping nails after dark, or the way wives may avoid using the proper name when addressing their husbands; all these can be interpreted as instances of implicit linkage. A conversation I had with a professional care-giver and mother of two can give an impression of how religion and other aspects of life can be implicitly linked. I asked her why she thought Hindu parents often say that they have no particular routine for teaching religion and Hinduism to their children. Her assessment is interesting, since this particular informant in her professional capacity has taken a special interest in the raising of minority children and bi-culturalism. In her view parents actually do teach their children a lot about religion, though without being aware of it always: “I think it’s very difficult for parents to distinguish between what is culture, social norms, what is religion and what is their own personality... They think that they are not passing on religion, while they in fact are.” (Fieldwork 1).

Informants have different views when asked directly whether various practices should be deemed as religious or cultural. Some say these are religious practices, some that they are cultural traditions, and sometimes their views seem inconclusive. The way Tushar alternates

between using the words “culture” and “religion” to characterise Hinduism seems to illustrate a fluidity in the boundaries between these categories: “The part of our religion, or our culture, that I think is the most positive aspect in Hinduism, is the way families stick together. It has its roots in religion...but somehow I feel it has more to do with culture”. In some of the interviews we can find statements where it is difficult both for researcher and informants to disentangle religion and other categories. Interesting examples to a similar effect are when informants do not quite seem to respond (according to my expectations) to the content of my questions about religion. Instead their responses seemed to contain information about something else, information which in Western general parlance might be listed under “culture”. The rather surprising content in an exchange with Shanti exemplifies this:

Q: Do you feel that there are areas of your religious life that are too personal and private to talk about?

Shanti: [pause] The monthly menstrual period.

Shanti proceeds to explain how, long ago, there were special customs in Hinduism that applied to a girl having her period. The girl was exempted from hard work, Shanti explains, and was allowed to relax in a corner of the house. But eventually people began to believe that the custom meant that she was unclean and that the girl therefore had to be confined to a corner. She continues:

Shanti: These are examples of things I can’t discuss openly at home in India, because it shocks people. I don’t really understand it. But I wouldn’t exactly say it’s Hinduism, because it doesn’t say anywhere that a girl is unclean when she has her period.

Q: Why did you mention the monthly period when I asked you about personal aspects of religion?

R: I was thinking about girls I have met in India. To them these things were very personal, and they are to me too.

The following table is an attempt at graphically illustrating how Hinduism in the discourse of my informants is linked to many aspects of life. By collecting various occurrences of words and terms that informants either equate, associate or relate to Hinduism, or employ as characterisations of Hinduism, and sorting by them into broad categories, I have attempted to set up an aggregate systematisation of categories that in various ways are associated with Hinduism. The overview is by no means exhaustive, and does not comprise all associated

terms, concepts and categories that actually occur in the interviews. Yet it does give an indication of how Hinduism is linked with many different areas of life:

Table 1: Overview of Associative Contents of Hinduism.

FORMALISED CULTURAL EXPRESSIONS	ASPECTS OF DAILY EXISTENCE	SOCIAL INTERACTION	GEOGRAPHY	CONCRETE “RELIGIOUS” EXPRESSIONS	ABSTRACT “RELIGIOUS” CONCEPTS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “stories”, myths • “dance”, “music” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “daily life” • “habits” • “way of life” • “practical matters” • “culture” • “traditions”, “customs” • various rules, prescriptions, tabus 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “parents” • Siblings • family in general • “Society” • marriage practices • “Obedience”, “love”, “respect” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “India” • History of India • Civilisation of India 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “rituals” • “festivals”, “celebrations” • “temple” • “mantra”, “prayer” • Gods, idols images 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “spirit”, “the spiritual”, “the soul” • “good deeds” • “religion” • “tolerance” • “truth” • “peace of mind” • “faith”

Occurrences of words and terms that informants either equate, associate or relate to Hinduism, or employ as characterisations of Hinduism. Each column represents a categorisation of the various words and terms into broad general categories. Quotation marks signify words actually used by informants. Unmarked words/terms are mine.

The linking between religion and other cultural activities is at times implicit and other times explicit in the discourse of informants. My observations are confirmed by the following description of Hinduism by Jackson and Nesbitt (1990:6) in a British RE-textbook:

Hinduism is very practical, and it includes rules of behaviour as well as all sorts of things that some people might think have nothing to do with religion. Your duties to members of your family, your attitude to your school work, what you eat for lunch or your family’s choice of a date for a sister’s or a brother’s wedding – to a Hindu all these are as much part of their religious tradition as worshipping at home or going on a pilgrimage.

In the following we will take a look at de-linking, which I discuss in terms of varying degrees of awareness to the possibility of abstraction of religion from other categories. Evidence to this effect emerges if we compare the quote from Tushar above with these two statements from Vinita and Kamlesh:

Vinita: Ever since childhood it has been very hard for me to understand the difference between what is founded on culture and what is founded on religion.

Kamlesh: Hinduism is a very large part of our culture. We don’t have clear borders between culture and religion. To me they are two sides of the coin.

Vinita's statement reflects an awareness of the possibility that the categories religion and culture can be differentiated, although she is not sure how. What Kamlesh says is interesting compared to for example Tushar's statement above (p. 94-95) and many of the other informants. Kamlesh here resorts to a Western discourse to explain a conceptual reality which is Indian. In doing this, she seems to show an awareness of a distinction in Western terminology between the categories Religion and Culture. She is also positive about the nature of the boundaries between the two categories in her world. Each of the three informants Tushar, Vinita and Kamlesh reflect different degrees of certitude about the relationship between the categories culture and religion.

In this regard Kavita presents us with an interesting observation of her own regarding Norwegians. In her experience, the way Hindus mix religious activities with non-religious activities and attitudes is completely different from what Norwegians do. She says:

In India there is always something religious involved whenever there is a celebration of some kind, weddings, childbirths. And any Hindu can participate in or even organize religious events, no matter if he is religious or not. Norwegians will only do this if they actually are professing Christians. Otherwise they won't. But in Hinduism nobody ever left the system and said they weren't Hindus any longer. You are always part of something. The attitude is that you can be just an ordinary person [i.e. not religious], and still invite for a Ramayanpuja at your house. Among Christians it's more that you'll only do something like that if you are a believing Christian. This is probably what the tiny difference is between Norwegians and Indians.

Kavita presumably knows well what she is talking about, since she went to Sunday School at the local church when she was a child, and had close Norwegian friends in her local community before moving to Oslo for her education. Her statement shows awareness of how Norwegians de-link religion. The following answer that Shubra gave to a question involving Indian religion and Indian culture is one of the few examples of explicit de-linking applied to the informant's own Hindu tradition:

A lot of it is mixed with each other, but really they [culture and religion] are two different things. Like food, it has little to do with religion, but lots to do with culture...Caste is a cultural thing. It's man-made. It has nothing to do with Hinduism.

Can we take the occurrences of de-linking as signs of host society influence? A quote from Shanti lends itself in support of such an assumption. The quote simultaneously shows the cultural strain that can arise in an encounter between different conceptual worlds, as well as exemplifying transitions between different conceptual worlds:

The way things are here in Norway, if you talk about something spiritual, people just associate it with alibaba-kadabra stuff, far out from reality...People keep telling me every time I talk about spiritual things that “you’re so philosophical” [in a derogatory, critical sense]. But in India the spiritual and the real are one. There is no difference. There nobody tells you “you’re so philosophical”. The spiritual thing, that’s the life there. But here you can see a clear difference between the spiritual and the material. I’ve noticed that. Here it gets so split up. I try to keep the spiritual and the material together. But I’m unable to keep either on the spiritual or the materialistic side. So now I have problems telling where I am.

Arvind complements Shanti in an interesting way:

If we look at Western society, almost nobody is religious, except the few who go to church. But in Hinduism you can still be connected with religion, and at the same time be materialistic.

Informants may vary in how accurately they state their views on the relationship between religion and other activities. In any case we can conclude that, as a common denominator, many share the ability to express verbally a conceptual distinction. But the fact that some informants use words and terminology that describe a de-linking of religion does not in itself imply that they consciously feel that religion is de-linked in their own life experience. The data can only positively demonstrate that by articulating de-linking, informants harbour a conceptual awareness of the option of de-linking. This awareness potentially translates into an ability to understand and explain what they see as differences between the way Hindus and Norwegians think about religion. A degree of appropriation of a Western conceptual universe may develop as an extension of this awareness.

As it happens, the data does contain scattered evidence that could be interpreted as realisations of the possibility of appropriation. Among Hindus that I have spoken to, the tendency is that the term “Hindu” is retained as a socio-cultural and ethnic designation, and that its religious aspects are de-emphasised. One can often hear people explain that, even if they call themselves Hindus, they are not religious. Vinita, Tushar, Sushil and Gopal are four young Hindus that do this, whereas Shubra and Kavita do not. The central point I wish to present here, however, is that even though Shubra and Kavita do not make the same choice as the other four, the manner in which they and other young Hindus talk about religion in relation to other aspects of culture is in itself evidence of a shift in the way young Hindus conceptualise religion. Religion is treated as an entity which can either be linked, or it can be de-linked. In either case, awareness of the possibilities leads to a degree of abstraction (or de-

linking) of religion from other areas of life. This, I believe, potentially represents a shift in the way young diaspora Hindus in Oslo *think* about religion.

7.3 Comparative Discussion

In the quote from Tushar above (p. 94-95), we saw how he alternated between the words “religion” and “culture” in connection with his description of what he felt were positive aspects of Hinduism. How can we explain the seeming uncertainty reflected in the way he alternates between these terms? I venture that the simple explanation to the question is that distinctions between religion and various other aspects of culture is not an issue in the tradition which Tushar is a part of and which informs his discourse on the subject. What Bankim Chandra Chatterji (1838-1894) wrote about his own tradition seems to support the contention: “The people of our country did not perceive the independent existence of that object which is understood by the word *religion*. How can we name it by a familiar name when we have no understanding of it?”⁸¹ Differentiation between religion and other activities, then, is not felt as a conceptual necessity. If we turn to the concept of dharma, we find that it does not posit an ontological distinction between religion and culture (and other categories too). Under this concept categories that from a Western point of view are understood as discrete, seem to blend into each other.⁸²

The following discussion will help us to get a grip on some of the differences between Hindu and Western perspectives in this area.

Referring to ethnography from rural India, Marriott observes that the categories of gods and men are thought by Indians to be mutually continuous, unseparated by qualities such as sacred-profane, spirit-matter: “...Indian thought joins certain ideas that are in the West regarded as ultimately dual” (Marriott 1976:113). The word “religion” to a Westerner, comments David Pocock (1973:xiii), “connote[s] an area of the *special*, a mode of reasoning about the universe governed by rules which are not those of day-to-day thought. [Religion] remains a separate area of life in the West”. Writes Brockington ((1981) 1989:2): “Since life [to a Hindu] is an integrated whole with its various aspects interdependent, religion cannot be

⁸¹ Racanavali: 673, in Brekke 1999:207.

⁸² Regarding “culture”, Burghart points to difficulties in using the term due to its imprecise meaning (Burghart 1987:242). On pp. 246-251 he discusses the semantic relationship between the Western term “culture” and its South Asian equivalents. These equivalents are *desa*, which refers to the people and traditions of a particular land, and *sanskṛti*, which refers to that which is refined, thus cultured. As a working definition of the term, the Merriam Webster Dictionary (Unabridged 2nd ed., 1968) offers the following definition of the term: “[T]he concepts, habits, skills, arts, instruments, institutions, etc. of a given people in a given period; civilization.” For a discussion of different approaches to understanding “culture”, the reader may consult Wuthnow (1989:12-15).

pondered over as a separate problem.” This interdependency can be a special challenge to a bibliographer, as Burghart remarks: “Hinduism seems to defeat the aim of the bibliographer to operate in world [sic] of clear, unambiguous categories” (Burghart 1987:280). Burghart argues that from a Hindu perspective, all aspects of social life can be ritually structured in a relation of worshipper and worshipped (Burghart 1987:235). Other scholars describe a broad congruity between many aspects of South Asian civilisation and religion.⁸³

In an article in *Contributions to Indian Sociology*, a presentation of fieldwork from one of the Gujarati communities in London, David Pocock shows how this community sees the preservation of language and culture to be intimately bound with the preservation of religious life among the young (Pocock 1976:341-365).⁸⁴ The journal’s editor, T.N. Madan, agrees with those who question the validity of establishing a sociology of Hinduism as separate from a sociology of Hindu society. He criticises current approaches to the study of Hinduism for producing “fragmentations of people’s experience,...between the religious and the non-religious...” (Madan 1976:367). Marriott charges sociologists with being too bound up in a Western analytical framework, and with not having “...recognized the predominant monism of Hindu thought” (Marriott 1976:113). An understandable charge perhaps, if W.C. Smith is correct that one of the distinct senses in the modern Western concept of religion involves a distinction between religion and other aspects of human activity in general, such as art, economics, – or culture (W.C. Smith 1978:47, 48).

In light of this brief comparative discussion, we can see how a particular meaning emerges out of a statement like this one from Gopal: “Usually I tell people that I am not very religious, but that I am born Hindu. I am very Hindu light right now. Some might even say that I am an atheist”. His usage of “Atheist” as a characterisation of religious orientation and “Hindu” as a socio-cultural identity do not seem to be mutually exclusive.

The linked vs. de-linked dichotomy drawn up in this chapter constitutes a part of the hermeneutical matrix that I introduced in the beginning of the thesis, which relates certain features in the notion of dharma to a particular analysis of the field material. Set against this matrix, we also see how a statement from Vinita seems to acquire a specific significance: “Just being in India is one big ritual in itself”. But what did she really mean when she said it?

⁸³ For further reading, see e.g. Larson (1995:178-277). Jeff Haynes remarks about nationalist conflicts in contemporary India: “What is striking about these Indian cases is how consistently they aim at political targets in order to solve religious problems...” (Haynes 1998:168).

⁸⁴ Jackson and Nesbitt make the same observation from supplementary classes in Coventry (Jackson and Nesbitt 1993:149).

The hermeneutical matrix directs our interpretation of what it can mean to us, namely an expression of Vinita's sense of linkage in India between religion and other activities.

7.4 How does de-linking happen?

This section suggests a tentative outline for a discussion of the question of how and why de-linking happens. A number of factors may be proposed that encourage de-linking in a variety of ways. The purpose of this chapter has not been to present an explanation for the how and why of de-linking, but rather to register the presence of the de-linking trend among my informants and to interpret it as a change in their conceptualisation of Hinduism. A point-by-point discussion of causes and explanations will therefore not be undertaken. In the following I nevertheless attempt to sketch a framework, or suggest a strategy, for how an inquiry into the phenomenon of de-linking. The framework which I propose is in the form of three broadly constructed categories for discussion: 1) structural patterning; 2) external ideational influence; and 3) internal ideational developments.

- Structural Patterning

Some of the phenomena we can observe, and which we think represent change, may be understood with reference to conditions inherent to the diasporic situation itself. These conditions can include the non-availability of items required in ritual, lack of fellowship with other Hindus and minority status. The effects of these conditions, together with the lack of a religious infra-structure to support the public aspects of Hinduism, cannot be escaped by a diaspora community that must exist on the terms laid down by its host society. I use the term "structural patterning" to describe the combined effect of these conditions. I discuss a few examples of this in the following.

As mentioned earlier, the Hindu community of Oslo owns a temple that is located at some distance from the city. Some informants told me that distance is one reason why they rarely go for a visit, unlike what they might have done in India. Younger informants typically say they will go to temple only a couple of times a year. Is this the result of ideational influences from a host society where the interest in religion is low? The rather low church attendance in Norway might indicate that this is the case (cf. Roof, W.C and O. Ågedahl 1996:135-58). A more straightforward explanation, rather, is that the temple is located far away and that an extra effort is required to get there. Informants indeed tell me that they would have visited the temple more often had there been one closer by. It appears that the

main reason for the low frequency of temple visits among nearly all of my informants is related to the “temple-situation” where they actually live (only one temple, and distance). A Gujarati informant describes life in India compared to Norway in this regard: “It’s very common to drop in at the local temple on your way to work, or go with some friends in the evening, to socialise maybe.” (Fieldwork 1: interview 4).

For Hindus in Oslo, then, participation in temple activities is a matter of effort and conscious choice. The structural feature of geographical distance introduces a spatial separation between home-centred religion and the more public temple-related religion. The financial position of the Oslo Hindu community does not permit the establishment of a more conveniently located temple, which could attenuate the effect of spatial separation.⁸⁵

Not only distance, but also time can drive a wedge between religious activities and other activities. An example of this is provided by a businessman who explained that, for him, time was the chief obstacle to participation in temple activities and events. He also lives far way from the temple. Since meetings in the temple are mostly held on Sundays, and Sunday is his only day off from work, he prefers to spend the day at home with his family instead of driving to the temple. But if he had the time, he emphasises, he most probably would drop by at the temple now and then (Fieldwork 1: interview 9). A different kind of example of chronological rift between ritual activity and other activity, is how the temple management must make concessions in the ritual calendar to fit in with the dominant, secular calendrical cycle of the host society. Bowen (1981:44) and Knott (1987:171-173) make note of this kind of adaptation to the weekly division between labour and holiday in Britain. The need for such adaptation is stronger if devotees live far away. Weekends and public holidays are the only time they can be expected to travel in any numbers to attend services. The Penn Hills Temple near Pittsburgh in the United States is an other example of adaptation in ritual both to chronological and geographical infrastructure (cf. Narayanan 1992:157-160). The situation is similar for the Slemmestad Temple outside Oslo.

We can see how the chronological infrastructure of the host society is a determinant in the chronological organisation of diaspora religion, an effect of which is that sacred time and profane time are held apart. Again financial considerations enter the equation: a local Hindu community may not have the financial or practical capacity to keep the temple open during the working week, as would be common in India.

⁸⁵ According to the SMS newsletter, a project is under discussion for the location of a new mandir within the Oslo city limits (June 2001).

What Nora Ahlberg states in general terms about traditional religions (i.e immigrant religions) in Norway is applicable to Hindus as well: “While traditional religions represent a total way of life, they in this country encounter a society which demands that they virtually must play different roles in their private and their public lives” [my translation] (Ahlberg 1989:205).⁸⁶

The developments discussed are structural changes, and do not necessarily represent conceptual changes in themselves. It is nevertheless important to allow that structural-related developments can enhance and amplify developments on the conceptual level.

- External Ideational

Despite the fair amount of data that exemplifies structural patterning of diaspora religion, I have not been able to infer from my data a clear causal relationship between ideational influence from the host society and de-linking. Yet in the instances of de-linking that are attested, we often detect a similarity to notions of religion that are common in Protestant Norway, such as the idea that religion is separate from other categories. It seems natural to ask, therefore, if these thoughts and attitudes can be attributed to ideational influences from Norwegian society and culture.

On a number of occasions when I have attended functions organised by Indian associations in Oslo, people have insisted that the activities were cultural and social events, and not really religious. This despite the activities’ involving bhajan-singing or readings of sacred texts, chanting of mantras, and maybe even a puja or an arti-ceremony. Are these sentiments a result of ideational influence or a strategy for promotion of a common cultural identity in the small, but culturally varied Indian community?

What could be interpreted as a case of accommodation to ideational influence is what happened a few years ago when the Indo-Norwegian Society in Oslo were planning their annual *Diwali* celebration.⁸⁷ A disagreement arose between the Society and the owners of the hall that was reserved for the event. The hall is located on the premises of a church. The disagreement involved the question of whether Diwali was a religious celebration dedicated to non-Christian deities, as the church management feared, or whether Diwali was a mere cultural event, the latter which was the position of the Society. After some discussion, the

⁸⁶ “Mens tradisjonelle religioner representerer en total livsform, møter de her til lands et samfunn som krever at de skal så å si spille ulike roller i sitt private og sitt offentlige liv.”

⁸⁷ The oldest association in Norway devoted to Indian cultural activities, was established in 1959. This association has a marked multi-cultural profile, with a 200+ membership that consists of Indians with various religious and regional backgrounds, and a majority of Norwegians. Norwegian name: Norsk-indisk forening.

church board agreed to the use of its premises on condition that their priest could be present at the event as an observer. The Society happily agreed, and the priest was satisfied that the activities he observed were expressions of Indian *culture*, and from his point of view acceptable on the premises of a Christian church.

But why is the need felt for distinction, in cases like these, between Hinduism and culture? I set the problem aside, and merely point to the possibility that an answer can be connected to ideational influences from the host society.

– *Internal Ideational Developments*

Although the issue comes beyond the scope of the thesis, I wish to briefly point to the possibility of internal developments in a tradition. In 19th century Bengal attempts were made among urban intellectuals to reinterpret dharma, making it possible to conceptually separate religion from tradition, a development that came about as a result of contact with the Europeans. Torkel Brekke (1999) writes about this in an article on the ideas of Swami Vivekananda, who was a decisive influence in the development of a new universalistic strand in the Hindu tradition. This universalism today lives on in what are often called Neo-Hindu movements.

The main intellectual impetus to these new ideas, according to Brekke, can be traced to Bankim Chandra Chatterji.⁸⁸ A central concern in his writing was to de-link and abstract the notion of dharma from the actual traditions and customs associated with Hindu communities. This put Bankim Chandra and his successors in a position to denounce what they considered superstitious aspects of tradition as not being part of Hinduism any longer. Simultaneously they heralded Hinduism as a system of beliefs and doctrinally sanctioned practices that could be classified as a universally valid religion, on par with Islam or Christianity. “Objectivisation” is the term Brekke uses to describe this process of de-linking religion and tradition in Neo-Hindu thought.

Although the developments described were historically triggered by contact with Europeans, the appropriation of these Western-inspired ideas has allowed them to gain a foothold and to wield a continued influence in parts of modern Hindu tradition. In this perspective, I propose, the issue of change in diaspora Hinduism can perhaps also be understood by referral to ideational developments within the tradition. This proposal seems to be able to draw support from Fitzgerald's theory of dharma 1-dharma 2, which I introduced in

⁸⁸Western spelling of his name has variations, e.g. Bankin Chandra, Bankimchandra. In bibliographies he is variously indexed under first or last name.

the previous chapter. The presence of universalism in dharma 2 Hinduism suggests how certain developments may be associated with elements that are already established in the tradition.

7.5 Conclusion

The discussion of the present chapter focuses on what seems like signs of a growing level of de-linking and abstraction of religion. This means that religion increasingly is being singled out as a category distinguishable from other cultural activities.

During interviews I tried to learn about informants' thoughts regarding religion and various aspects of culture, thoughts which varied. Kamlesh, for instance, explicitly states several places that Indian culture and Hinduism are closely linked. "They are two sides of the coin", in her words. Tushar, on the other hand, is less clear in the way he alternates between "culture" and "religion". Yet many informants share a minimum common ground in being aware of different options as to whether religion can be linked or de-linked. I interpret this awareness as evidence of a shift in the conceptualisation of religion. That this shift is attributable to influence from the host society seems to be a reasonable assumption, although there is little in the data that directly throws light on just how this process works. In an attempt to structure the problem for further discussion, I sketched three possible points of departure for an investigation into the causal relationships between de-linking and host society influence: 1) Structural patterning; 2) external ideational influence; and 3) internal ideational developments.

The question of why a de-linking of the monistic Hindu universe occurs in diaspora opens several possible angles for research. For example, one could explore whether structural patterning in the form of legal regulation can have an effect on an association's self-understanding as primarily a cultural or a religious entity. One could also ask if "conceptual peer pressure" in a school environment represents a form of external ideational influence. For the present purposes, though, it suffices to make note of the observable similarities between Western conceptualisations of religion and what diaspora Hindus think about religion.

If my interpretation is correct that de-linking is on the increase, it means that my informants are actually changing their ideas about their own religion and, to an extent, religion in general. The process can be concretised as a re-fitting of the underlying conceptual framework of Hinduism, i.e. dharma, so that it is adapted to some of the features of Western religion.

A consequence of these developments is that young Hindus feel a need to ask questions about what to include under “religion” and what not. For a religious person, it is a question of what from the Hindu heritage to include in one’s personal religious life. For the non-religiously inclined, it is a question of what to disregard.

8 REASON TO BELIEVE

Why should I believe in something they can't explain?

-Vinita.

8.1 Introduction

A noticeable characteristic in the discourse of many informants is an often pronounced sense of frustration at not being able to get what they feel are satisfactory explanations and justifications for the traditions and beliefs of Hinduism. Says Vinita: “The hardest thing about Hinduism is that you are asked just to accept it. It’s like maths, if you can’t accept that things are the way they are, you won’t be any good at it. It’s the same way with me and Hinduism.”

In the present chapter I examine some of the dissatisfaction and cognitive unease expressed by informants in light of two different strategies of legitimisation. These I term the prescription-description strategy and the explication strategy. The reader should note that although the terms authority and meaning probably have wider currency, I have this terminology because it seems to fit better with my discussion. The two strategies represent, respectively, the approach found in the tradition of informants’ parents, and an approach common in Western religious tradition. The latter approach is often preferred by the younger generation as the result of an internalisation of host society cultural values.

The presence of a tension between these two strategies in the fieldwork data is highly significant since, as I argue, it is directly related to the diaspora condition. It is also highly significant in that a move among young Hindus towards a preference for explication can be interpreted as a departure from a particular type of legitimisation strategy, entrenched in dharma, thus constituting a reconceptualisation of Hinduism.

Several informants told me that they feel ill at ease when Norwegians ask about Hinduism. Some pleaded a poor knowledge of Hinduism as the reason, and a few felt there is little use in explanation since, in their opinion, Hinduism is too difficult for Norwegians to

understand anyway. Others, as I have noted in chapter 6 (“Who Can Be a Hindu?”), might try to avoid such situations altogether.

But being in a minority, the pressure to explain ones’ beliefs and customs is hard to avoid, and sooner or later Hindus try to find and give answers to the questions they face. My data shows evidence of an interesting process in this regard: the one-way traffic of outsiders querying and Hindus responding evolves into a multi-lane stream of answers redefined and new questions generated. The questions are in turn appropriated by the Hindus, and redirected towards their own community. Burghart notes the significance of this in diaspora Hinduism: “Understanding the logic of question and answer is essential in analyzing Hinduism in Britain, for ‘British Hinduism’ is being shaped by the kinds of questions which non-Hindus, as much as Hindus, ask of it” (Burghart 1987:226). Below I discuss what informants themselves tell us about this stream of questions and answers. The first part of the following discussion shows how change is connected to the diaspora condition. The second part focuses on the questions and the answers.

8.2 The Diaspora Connection

Much of the information I have suggests that the process of question-and-answer which Burghart refers to is an integrated characteristic of the diaspora condition. The link between questioning and diaspora is observable on several levels, from the level of direct querying by outsiders, to the level of the more indirect cultural and cognitive influences at work in the host society. Informants offer numerous examples of how questioning which occurs at work and in other social contexts. Kamlesh, who is married to a non-Hindu, says: “Here you constantly have to explain to people that you are Hindu. You are constantly reminded that you are different.” Of course, one might imagine that being married to a non-Hindu by the very nature of things makes curiosity and questions from friends and relatives unavoidable. Moreover, unmarried informants tell the same story. I asked Shubra, who is not married: “Do you think living here in Norway affects you as a Hindu?” Her reply:

Yes, to an extent. After all, we are raised in a Norwegian culture, which gives us all kinds of input from friends, acquaintances, everywhere. It helps us to think Hinduism over. It has helped me in the sense that I don’t just accept what I get from my parents and what I read. Living here makes me more critical. I think a lot about things and why they are. Had I lived in India, I would probably have accepted much more of Hinduism, just because everybody else does. But when people ask me questions I have to think twice, and that’s when I can discover for myself what I believe about this or that particular thing in my religion. Like when you said you wanted to interview me, I

spent a couple of weeks thinking over questions that I have never thought about before. Nobody ever asked me those kinds of questions before, in fact. And that has helped me to discover my religion more than I ever have before.

For young people, school is a particularly important arena for the sort of encounter that Shubra talks about. A couple of the male interviewees told me that they had held classroom presentations about Hinduism. For example, Kumar⁸⁹ relates how he as a third grader was asked by his teacher if he would like to present Hinduism to his class. The presentation went so well, he says, that his teachers also later asked him to do talks and presentations throughout grade school and high school. His childhood and adolescent experience of explaining Hinduism was seminal in developing an active relationship with his own religious identity, he explains. He strongly believes in the importance of being ready to answer when people want to know about Hinduism. Kumar likes talking about religion and is quite happy to be known as a Hindu. In this respect Kumar's attitude seems to be different from the way Shubra and several other informants feel about "advertising" their religion (Kavita's term), as many of my informants will often prefer to avoid discussions about religion. But questioning can hardly be avoided, since the inescapable fact of being different invites the curiosity and inquiry of outsiders.

Direct questioning is not the only influence that shapes diaspora Hinduism. The absence of what Berger (1990:40, etc.) calls the *plausibility structures* that exist in India is another feature that influences diaspora Hinduism. Plausibility structures are the taken-for-granted structures and features of the social environment that support religious assumptions and beliefs. For example, the often-conspicuous public celebrations of Hindu festivals and religious occasions pass unnoticed in the larger social arena of the host society. "Hinduism is no longer in the air", in the words of one informant (Fieldwork 1). The concept of plausibility structures is closely related to what I referred to in the previous chapter as "structural patterning". A difference is that Berger's concept focuses on how the *absence* of certain structures, such as public celebrations, stimulate the development of new legitimisation strategies. My term, "Structural patterning", puts the focus on how the *presence* of certain structures can influence developments.

Questioning that involves an encounter with other truth claims can introduce a particular urgency to the process of formulating answers. Listening to Shubra again, her account of discussions with a non-Christian is interesting: "I have a Jewish friend. When she

⁸⁹ Kumar is a second-generation informant included in Fieldwork 1

talks about her faith, I immediately think about Hinduism. What is different? What is the same and why? Thinking like this helps me to understand my own religion better.”

Bimal Krishna Das, who is Secretary to The National Council of Hindu Temples (UK), told me how many of his own thoughts on Hinduism had changed as a result of dialogue with members of other faiths when he was younger:

In discussions with friends and other young people, which often touched on religion, I found I knew nothing about our religion, whereas Muslims and Christians knew everything about theirs. That is one of the reasons why I became interested in religion. It happens to almost every single person who grows up here, and that is what happened to me.⁹⁰

The moment a Hindu and a Westerner enter into dialogue, a need arises for providing answers and explanations that are acceptable according to the understanding of the Western inquirer. Since he is on the turf of the enquirer, so to speak, it means that a Hindu must formulate his responses so that they make sense within the terms defined by the cognitive environment of the enquirer's majority culture. The alternative for a Hindu immigrant is to place himself in a cognitive minority position – something one expects would be undesirable to most people.

To a Hindu, dialogue can involve a challenge of addressing issues and concepts that do not correspond to those of his own tradition. A diaspora Hindu sometimes finds himself in a situation where he must formulate from scratch new answers to new problems, in the process often dealing with issues that may actually be non-issues to his own tradition. Kim Knott notes the effect of dialogue in the case of a temple management committee in Leeds. As a trust-building measure towards their local neighbourhood they had decided to open their temple to visitors (Knott 1986:83):

Attitudes expounded and questions asked by visitors [to the temple] leave their mark on the religious self-understanding of those Hindus present. Because of this type of interaction those centrally involved have tended to make way for other religious, and even scientific, worldviews in their presentation of the Hindu faith.

Interaction with the majority culture involves more than figuring out what to tell curious Westerners. The dynamics of dialogue and the influence of the cognitive culture of the host society has the effect of gradually prodding young Hindus to formulate questions of their own. Norwegians can be challenged to explain features of Christianity. For example, Shubra would like to know: “How could Jesus rise from the dead? There must be some logical

⁹⁰ Conversation at the Hare Krishna Temple in Watford, May 1999

explanation to how they can believe that.” But the thrust of questioning is directed towards their own tradition and community. Many of these are questions to which their parents do not have the answers or have not even considered. Increasingly some of my informants find themselves grappling with problems that they have developed and articulated themselves. Gopal ventilates his frustration thus: “Mother has a lot of these it’s-just-the-way-it-is rules. I think it’s ridiculous. But I never get any explanations”. One observant parent, by contrast, told to me:

The difference between us and our children is that they go much deeper into what Hinduism is. That’s because at school, their friends ask them all kinds of questions, and to be able to answer they have to understand Hinduism properly themselves.

8.3 Questions and Answers

Finding answers is no straightforward task. From a study of members of the Ramakrishna Mission in Britain, Séan Carey reports an example from the home of a Bengali family where he had been invited for dinner. Their teenage daughter complained about restrictions imposed on her by her parents, to which they responded by patiently explaining the benefits of these restrictions and other aspects of her culture. Carey relates how the girl was completely unimpressed and how the parents were stuck for words in the face of her arguments: “She could not believe in the parents’ religion because no one had explained why she should believe.” (Carey 1987:91,92).

In this section I discuss the same kind of difficulties that Carey describes both in getting answers and in giving answers.

- The Difficulty In Getting Satisfactory Answers

Numerous examples from my own interviews speak of a keen sense of dissatisfaction when young Hindus turn to their parents without getting good answers and explanations to the issues they wonder about. At times the reason is simply that parents do not know the answer. But frequently, and more importantly, the cause of dissatisfaction lies in a mismatch between the *type* of answer expected and *type* of answer offered. Jackson and Nesbitt report from their work: “...parents and grandparents often feel ill equipped to answer children’s questions, saying that in their day no one asked such questions” (Jackson and Nesbitt 1993:154): I have selected an example of the same from the interview with Vinita:

I kept asking and digging and searching for answers to why we believed in the myths, and how such-and-such a thing could have happened. But they [the parents] never could answer my questions. They just said that it is the tradition. I never got the kind of answers I would get if I asked the same questions about Christianity in RE classes at school. My teachers said: “These are just illustrations, examples. The Creation Story was only made for the sake of our faith, not as a literal account of creation”. Not even a simple explanation as that did I get.

In this example from Vinita we see how the answers from her parents and from her teachers differ in type. In the case of the answer that her parents gave, the answer constitutes a *description* of the way things are. Knowing the tradition is the key to understanding it. In the case of the answer from her teachers, a particular interpretative device is applied to the Biblical narrative. Referring to an external logical tool in order to rationalise the myth is here the key to understanding.

To Vinita, the answer from her parents has little or no explanatory force, whereas the answer from her teachers is met with approval. The difficulty Vinita experienced in finding good answers to her questions had consequences for her participation in religious activities in her later teens. At one point, Vinita relates, her parents were unable to answer her endless questions, and advised her to write to a knowledgeable uncle in India and ask him. Unfortunately, he too was unable to answer her adequately, only adding to her general sense of frustration at not getting answers that she could accept. Vinita’s unrest stemmed from an unsuccessful quest for explanations of a particular type, explanations that contained something other than a statement of how things were done. Later she would conclude that she could not participate in the rituals merely on the basis that “it is the tradition”. This was nevertheless a justification that sufficed for her parents, and exemplifies the sort of legitimisation strategy that Vinita objected to.

Vinita’s experience shows how young Hindus face a predicament when inadequate assistance is available from parents in dealing with problems and questions. Sometimes the problems are brought up by inquisitive Norwegian friends and sometimes, as with Vinita, by young Hindus themselves. The dearth of a Hindu apologetic literature, coupled with the lack of a tradition for using such literature, accentuates the challenge.⁹¹

⁹¹ The evidence of my fieldwork shows that young Hindus are not very familiar with the sacred texts of their tradition in the sense that they actually read them to any extent. Also, hardly any books attempting to explain the tenets of Hinduism, written by Hindus for Hindus, are available. An interesting exception is the catechism-style *Am I a Hindu?* by Edankkandiyil Vishvanathan (San Francisco, Halo Books 1994 , and later reprints) which, judging by a couple of reviews I have seen, seems to have gained some circulation amongst US Hindus.

The following quote from Tushar is a typical example of the discrepancy that often shows up between the type of answer sought by young Hindus, and the type of answer provided by their elders:

We have a rule that says you're not supposed to drink water after eating cucumber. If I ask why not, all my mother can say is that 'in India they say that we are not supposed to drink water after eating cucumber. We just don't do it'. I have never been given any good reason for this rule. Maybe it sounds a little silly, but there are many things like this. For our parents who were raised in India it was enough that their parents told them something. But for us who maybe are a little modernised, we are not so strongly tied up with our religion, and so we want answers. I know I irritate my parents when they tell me things about Hinduism that I'm supposed to do and I keep asking why. Then all they can say is "that's the way it is". But to me it's not good enough. Whether I am going to keep something or not, I must have a proper reason for it.

Tushar and Vinita appear to have similar reasons for their sense of dissatisfaction, and just like Vinita, Tushar's intellect craves for a different type of answer than the one he gets. The answer from his mother explains a practice in terms of description of the practice in India, a description simultaneously functioning as a prescription. But the answer which he seeks, and which he does not get from his mother, is an answer that offers explanation by reference to what Tushar calls "a proper reason". *Explication* is the term I have chosen to describe the sort of answer that Tushar seeks. The method of narrative interpretation used by Vinita's teacher is one of a few examples of actual explication that are recorded in the field material. Another example, as the reader may recall from the chapter "Apart from Religion", is Shanti's recourse to history in order to rationalise present-day rituals associated with the menstrual cycle. Kumar (Fieldwork 1) would probably agree with Shanti. He says: "Hinduism is a very scientific religion. There is a cause and a reason behind every aspect of it." The way these informants use explication to legitimise Hinduism appears to embody strategies that are very similar to those Westerners often use to legitimise their religion. In a study on US Hindus, Narayanan (1992:165-174) observes how some resort to Western modes of analyses (e.g. psychoanalysis) to interpret and rationalise their own religious tradition.

The field data clearly shows that the enterprise of explaining religion is approached very differently by the younger and the elder. The types of answers sought are of a new and different kind than the ones their parents grew up with. This analysis by Shubra is a near-verbatim repetition of what other informants have to say on the score:

I think our parents have accepted a great deal, blindly taken over what they learned from their parents. They never asked questions, but if they did, they were told that "it's

just the way it is”, and accepted it. That is the big difference between us [and our parents].

The difference that Shubra refers to can be understood in terms of the difference between the description-prescription strategy and the explication strategy.

- Difficulty in Giving Answers

When good answers are hard to get, good answers are hard to give. Vinita, ever the humorist, describes the situation thus: “Once I read a joke on the Internet that proof you’re a Hindu is when you can’t explain Hinduism to your friends!” Sometimes, when I contacted potential informants for the first time, they said they didn’t think they would be suitable informants for me, since they felt they knew so little about Hinduism. But people usually accepted my request after I explained that the purpose of my interview was not to test their knowledge about Hinduism, but rather to talk about what it is like to be a Hindu.

I have commented elsewhere on the apparent lack of factual knowledge about Hinduism that I often encountered among the people I interviewed. I would like to argue, however, that the hesitation to talk about Hinduism cannot solely be attributed to a shortage of factual knowledge.⁹² The evidence of the field material shows that this state of affairs must also be understood in the light of the related discursive mismatch, or dissonance, that exists between young Hindus and their parents. Like their parents, young Hindus have difficulties articulating answers that seem acceptable and relevant to a non-Hindu. Answers acceptable to non-Hindus, then, are of the type that would comprise the explication-category, whereas the answer types, or legitimisation strategies, that my informants are accustomed to belong to the prescription-description category.

In the first of the analysis chapters, “We Hindus and I”, I mentioned how religious transmission among Hindus differs from practices that are common in the Western world. Learning-by-doing is an important aspect of the transmission method of Hindus, a process aptly describable as “cultural osmosis”.⁹³ Consequentially, the way that Hindus and Westerners learn and talk about religion is different, and a discursive mismatch ensues. Vinita observes:

⁹² Jackson and Nesbitt write: “According to many Hindu adults in Britain their children know little or nothing of their own tradition, and there is relatively little in the anthropological literature to challenge this” (Jackson and Nesbitt 1993:10).

⁹³ The credit for this highly fitting term is due someone else, but unfortunately I have not been able to locate the reference, despite very diligent and patient efforts. I ask the reader to excuse the grievous oversight!

For our parents who have lived half their lives in India, they learned that everything about being Hindu is self-evident. To them, it's a matter of it's-just-the-way-it-is. Custom. What you do. With young Hindus today, I think they feel that being able to say that they are Hindus brings them a sense of belonging. They have that. But then they get to a point where they have to explain it and prove it. And that's when they lose.

A further illustration of discursive mismatch seems to be Shubra's assertion that Norwegians form questions about Hinduism on the basis of what they have read in school text books, but that their knowledge of Hinduism has nothing to do with the Hinduism she knows: "I hardly recognise my own religion in the school books", she says. Shubra's comment is echoed in Kavita's experience: "When we went to school and learned about Hinduism, we learned many things I had never heard about before." Michaelson's observation from her work on the Lohana community in Britain is an interesting supplement to the discussion (Michaelson 1987:46):

Lohanas may sometimes be heard to assert that they are ignorant about their religion... This is a problem which has been brought into focus in this country, since they feel they should be able to explain their strange customs and to make them intelligible to interested outsiders. Previously, they simply carried out their rituals and ceremonies without considering whether they could explain their meaning or provenance. This knowledge was largely procedural or evaluative (e.g. does a particular ritual achieve its aim).

Some informants say that insufficient knowledge of Hindi prevents them from reading and understanding "the books", and so learning more about their religion. Limitations in language skills potentially also translate into difficulties in identifying suitable Norwegian words for native religious terms. In extension of the discussion, I suggest that the strong emphasis on praxis in the Hindu tradition does not seem to fit very well into the sort of scholastic-like discourse that is common in many Protestant contexts. Occasionally I got the impression that articulating theoretical/theological concepts could be troublesome to some informants. Without making too much out of this, I would suggest that the difficulty is connected with Hinduism's traditionally low emphasis on doctrine. Doctrine, as realised in a Protestant context, is particularly amenable to verbal, scholastical discourse. (The relationship between praxis and theoretical concepts is discussed further in the next chapter, "To Believe or to Do?").

- *Some Types of Explanations Attested*

For the sake of precision I must add that the dichotomy suggested above between prescription-description as opposed to explication conceals the variety of legitimisation types attested in the data. In an attempt to compensate for this, I will briefly comment below on some legitimisation types that I encountered in both Fieldwork 1 and 2.

- **Tradition, ancestral/cultural heritage and, very rarely, scripture:** “I do/believe this because the tradition says so”. Invoking established cultural and religious norms as a basis for legitimisation is by far the most common strategy in the fieldwork interviews, a strategy which I have chosen to call the description-prescription type. This is also the type of legitimisation strategy that invites the strongest sense of dissatisfaction among young Hindus.
- **The desirable effect of a religious practice or belief:** “We do/believe this because it works/has a good effect”. The perceived relationship between a ritual and its desired outcome is widely recognised in the Hindu tradition. Many examples of this surface in the interviews too. Informants often point to the properties various practices have in bringing about desired effects, such as good fortune or peace of mind. Some informants explain how the use of mantras can relieve sleeplessness, stress and even fear. An interesting example is Vinod who, though not completely sure, speculates whether there might be a connection between his generally improved educational performance after he heeded the advice of a *Pandit* to do Shiva Puja on Mondays.
- **Narratives:** Informants frequently refer to the events and episodes of Hindu myths and narratives as a basis for description and legitimisation of various beliefs and practices. Legitimisation that involves narrative can sometimes, roughly speaking, run along lines like this: “We do/believe this because of the story that says ...”. I have also encountered examples of the use of narrative structured something like this: “We have a belief/practice X, and this particular story talks about it and helps us to understand it, and therefore we observe X”. In this sort of example, it looks like the value of a belief/practice is a function of its potential for narrative treatment. This sort of legitimisation strategy may seem irrelevant to the Western observer. Even so it can have validity within a different cognitive framework, such as the Hindu tradition. Informant Vijay observes: “The Hindus here know a lot about the rituals, the gods, the stories, and

little about the philosophical aspects of Hinduism. Hindus explain things through stories, but the Christians explain things through theoretical structures”. His observation is supported by Vinita, who says: “for us Hindus, the stories about the Gods express all the values we need in life.” S.Kakar’s remark on the contrasting role of narrative in the Indian and modern Western tradition is interesting in this context:

While the twentieth-century West has wrenched philosophy, history and other human concerns out of integrated narrative structures to form the discourse of isolated social sciences, the preferred medium of instruction and transmission of psychological, metaphysical, and social thought in India continues to be the story. Narrative has thus been prominently used as a way of thinking, as a way of reasoning about complex situations, as an inquiry into the nature of reality (S. Kakar 1990:1).

- **Explication:** Examples of this type of explanation are very few. Even so, the material shows that is the kind of answer that young Hindus continuously strive to develop as an intellectually acceptable alternative to the answers offered by their parents and their tradition. Incidentally, in the few examples of explication that do occur, informants never employ this strategy to legitimise Hindu identity as such. Explication, when appealed to, invariably in a context of matters of practices and beliefs. Hindu identity is consistently treated as a given.
- **The Will of God:** It may be of interest to note that I have only one or two very brief instances of legitimisation by reference to anything that resembles a notion of “God’s will”. The most explicit reference I have located in the field material is 23 year-old Sushil who says: “I can only know by intuition what God requires of me”.

8.4 Conclusion

The present chapter shows how the task of explaining Hinduism to non-Hindus is both provoked by and structured by the diaspora situation itself. As the dynamic of outsiders asking – Hindus responding eventually becomes more complex, young Hindus start to formulate questions of their own, addressing them towards their parents, as well as entering into debate with Norwegians. Certain obstacles emerge in this process when Hindus discover that their parents, elders and their tradition are often unable to offer satisfactory solutions to many of the questions raised. As a consequence, diaspora Hindus frequently face the predicament of being without good answers to questions that they face from the host society.

I argued, however, that lacking good answers cannot simply be attributed to a lack of factual knowledge. In trying to understand the predicament that Hindus face in this regard, we must be alert to the impact of differences in modes of transmission and, in particular, differences in modes of legitimisation between South Asian and Western discourse on religion.

It is apparent that many parents and their children live in different cognitive worlds. A generation gap exists owing to the younger generation's acculturation into a cognitive tradition that is different from that of their parents, as the classroom example from Vinita's interview illustrates. One of the important conclusions drawn from the data is that the generation gap is observable as a mismatch in type between the answer expected to a question and the answer provided by parents. I described this as a discursive mismatch.

This chapter also shows how, when Hindus either respond to or initiate dialogue, they try to formulate new answers and explanations that harmonise in type with the legitimisation strategies that their Western friends are familiar with. Moreover, these new answer types often harmonise better with the cognitive traditions that young Hindus themselves have absorbed through years of social and cultural interaction in a Western society.

Making note of these features, I submit, represents a highly significant insight into an aspect in the development of diaspora Hinduism – i.e the process of reworking strategies of legitimisation. This process has important implications for diaspora Hindus approach to the *raison d'être* of their tradition and, to an extent, their own identity. In literature on diaspora Hinduism this process does not seem to be given the attention I believe it deserves. Instead, the focus is predominantly on the question of perpetuation of the praxis elements of the tradition in diaspora: in other words, the “what” in diaspora Hinduism, rather than the “why”. Limiting investigation to changes and adjustments in praxis (the “what”) does not necessarily provide information on changes in legitimisation strategies. To gather information on this aspect, we must turn our attention to analysing the “why” in diaspora Hinduism, or in Burghart's terminology, the “logic of question and answer”.

A consequence of the changes we can observe in legitimisation potentially is a reconceptualisation in people's notions of the nature of Hinduism. From being an entity that responds to inquiry with descriptions of, and unexplained prescriptions for, practices and beliefs, Hinduism is reconceptualised into an entity that is able to provide rationally substantiated and, according to the gauge of Western cognitive presuppositions, intellectually acceptable explanations for its tenets. As a consequence, Hinduism is gradually transformed in the minds of my informants into something capable of being explained – *explicated* – and

which transcends the bounds of mere assertion and description. A gradual shift occurs away from prescription-description towards explication. An example is Shubra's wish that if anything should change in Hinduism, it ought to be what she thinks is most people's habit of blindly accepting the traditions and the books: "After all, Hinduism teaches that you should be critical to what you are told", she says.

9 TO BELIEVE OR TO DO?

I just do prayers for the sake of doing it.

- Shanti

9.1 Introduction

This chapter explores some differences between the Hindu and Western traditions with regard to the experience of meaning in connection with religion.

For the sake of illustration, the difference that I discuss here can be visualised as two semantic zones around which each of the religious traditions of India and the West revolve. Following the illustration, we can say that for a Hindu, religious meaning is primarily generated in a semantic zone dominated by praxis – religion is doing certain things. The field data shows that this is the case with most informants. For a Western person, religious meaning is derived from a semantic zone that involves concern for matters of faith and doctrine. For example, among many Norwegians, my impression is that being religious is mainly seen as a matter of belief, independently of whether one actually goes to church or not. I have chosen to use the term “ideology” to designate this orientation in how meaning in religion is experienced.

Fieldwork evidence suggests that for some of my informants, location of the sense of meaning in religion is shifting towards the semantic zone of Western religion, that is, from praxis towards ideology. This chapter discusses this shift in terms of a dichotomy between praxis and ideology.

The chapter begins with an overview of field data that can tell us about the relationship between praxis and ideology in informants’ thoughts about and experience of religion. The next section offers theoretical input on interpretation of this relationship. In that context I suggest the term “Protestantisation” as a label for the shift towards an ideology-orientation, due to some of the similarities with features of Protestant religion. The chapter

concludes that although some informants show evidence of an increased orientation towards ideology, there is only scant evidence that can explain exactly why this happens.

9.2 The Field Data

This section gives an overview of the field data with respect to the relationship between praxis and ideology among informants. The following contexts in the interviews yield information about this relationship: notions on the content of Hinduism; what is religious? What are the differences between Hindus and Christians? About rituals; responses to questions about meanings. The sequence of these contexts constitutes an outline for the following discussion.

- Notions on the Content of Hinduism

I tried to form a picture of the type of notions informants had about things such as the beliefs, doctrines and core values of Hinduism – the contents of Hinduism. I achieved this by directly asking: “what do Hindus believe in?” Here are some answers from five different informants – all in response to the same question:

Sushil: That question is nearly hopeless to answer.

Gopal: I suppose they believe in all kinds of things. I never thought about it. I don't know. My impression is that many Hindus are religious because it's just the way it is.

Q: What about the basic values of Hinduism, what are they?

Gopal: Tolerance, probably. I don't know. I don't know enough to be able to answer the question.

Kavita: You sure wonder! [Laughter]. I don't know myself. They believe in some kind of a great power or other. Through many different figures, or Gods, they believe in something that sits on top. But I don't quite know.

Usha: Hindus can be so tolerant that it can be nearly impossible to know what they really believe in.

Shanti: I don't think that people in India quite know what Hinduism is, including Hindus here and myself. There are very few who know what Hinduism is...But I feel that Hinduism is something else than the impression most people have. But I don't quite know myself what Hinduism is, because I interpret it in my own way.

The selected examples reveal an uncertainty about concrete beliefs, a feeling which seems to be fairly common. Sometimes informants also supply more specific information about what they feel are central contents of Hinduism. As an example of this, we return to Shanti:

Q: What is the core of Hinduism?

Shanti: The core of Hinduism? [pause] To me – what I like about Hinduism – to me Hinduism is that I can educate myself to become a better person, so to speak. But Hinduism is not just one thing, it's many other things.

These are examples of “other things” frequently referred to in the data as central to Hinduism, ordered by approximate frequency of occurrence: various rules; how you relate to family and relatives; God, various Gods; a higher power/force; belief in “something”; be a good human being and be good to all; tolerance. Examples of “other things” only rarely referred to in the data as central to Hinduism, are: investigation of truth; destiny; soul;⁹⁴ *Moksha*⁹⁵

From these examples of specific information about the contents of Hinduism, we nevertheless get an impression of a certain fuzziness to people's notions about the contents of Hinduism. Indeed, the feel and texture of these examples represent by far the most common trend. Concrete beliefs, when described, are most commonly of a fairly general nature, such as belief in God and a higher force, or the enjoinder to be good to all. Mentions of beliefs with a more specific, doctrinal quality represent the least dominant trend. Apart from the examples mentioned, the phrase “Hinduism is a way of life” is repeated by informants so many times over that it gains a slogan-like quality.⁹⁶ The discussion below adds some light on what this phrase may express.

- What is Religious?

A wealth of information materialises when informants are asked what it means to be “religious”, a question which I often put forward. In the data collected from my second-generation informants there some 30 or so references to what being religious entails. The data reveals two trends, a dominant trend and a secondary trend. Sometimes both trends are present in the same interview.

The dominant trend is that being religious is seen by informants as primarily a matter of practices and ritual observances. Every now and then informants refer to themselves or other Hindu acquaintances as “very religious” or “not so religious”. When someone is described as “religious”, it usually means that a certain type, or a certain number of religious practices are

⁹⁴Says Arvind: “The core of Hinduism is Soul... There are few other religions where the soul is as important”.

⁹⁵Says Sushil: “Hindus believe in Moksha... [P]ersonally I think attaining Moksha seems pretty boring. I would rather live happily here on Earth”.

⁹⁶The phrase is so commonly used by Hindus that one may be justified in arguing argue that it has the function of a doctrine.

observed, and also that they are observed reasonably often. Incidentally, most of the informants that come under the dominant trend describe themselves as “not so religious”.

The secondary trend, evident in roughly a third of the interviews, is that religiosity is also, or primarily, understood as related to attitudes, feeling, inner disposition, or points of view/abstract values. The importance of religious/ritual practices tends to be downplayed. Informants who subscribe to this view often describe themselves as religious. I discuss both trends in the following, beginning with some examples of the dominant trend:

Arvind: The way you can tell if a person is religious or not is to look at how he lives. For example if you see a punk⁹⁷ on the street with hair [sic] or something, then you understand right away that he is not religious.

Tushar: I believe in God, but what I mean when I say I am not religious is that I don't practice the religion.

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What does it mean to be religious? It means that you follow, maybe not fully, but partly, what Hinduism says. To live the way that Hinduism says you should live, that is what I call religious...Like, if you read Ramayan or the *Mahabharat*, you get an impression of how you are supposed to live if you want to be a Hindu – to me living like a Hindu, that's what religious is...So if I were religious I would have lived like a Hindu, and not eaten McDonald's and things like that [he refers to earlier mention of beef], I think. I think it's difficult to live outside India and at the same time be very religious.

The quotes from Arvind and Tushar are examples of how religion and religiosity, according to most of my informants, are mainly related to how you live – i.e. praxis. It is also of interest to note that Tushar relates Hinduism to where you live, a point that, however, will not be developed here. The following reply from Shubra, though not quite related to the present discussion, is an indirect commentary on the role of praxis in the conceptualisation of religion among young Hindus:

Q: Do you know what it means when Christians talk about salvation?

Shubra: No, I don't know how they do it. I have never participated in that.

For the sake of contextuality, I include the question to which Shanti here responds:

Q: What does it mean to be religious?

Shanti: You can't see that I am Hindu.⁹⁸ Some say that you can't even tell that I am Indian! At Kirtans I get a red string. People [Norwegian friends] ask me what it's

⁹⁷ Norw.: “pønker”, person who subscribes to certain styles in music, dress etc.

for, and sort of for fun I tell them that this is where my strength lies. But I don't have any answer, really. Myself I don't know what to say. There is just so much to explain, so I don't.⁹⁹

At first glance it seems that Shanti is not answering my question; after all I presented a fairly direct question about the meaning of religion to her. Closer examination shows, though, how my own preconceived notions and conceptualisations in this case prevented me from recognising that Shanti's understanding of my question and her answer in turn is shaped by preconceived notions and conceptualisations of her own. Her answer in fact shows how, among young Hindus, that their notions of religiosity are shaped by a notion of praxis as a predominant component of religion. Another example of how a seemingly incomplete answer supports this conclusion is taken from one of my first-generation (Fieldwork 1) informants, a family man from the state of Uttar Pradesh. He is a Brahmin, with an eldest daughter of 17:

Q: How would you feel if your daughter converted to Christianity?

A: It would be not be a problem. Other things would be much worse. For example if she didn't behave properly, went around naked in the street, started drinking or going to parties and so forth (Fieldwork 1, interview 1).

Noteworthy in his reply is that he, like Shubra and Shanti, turns his attention to behavioural aspects. Insofar as he is willing to talk about it, matters of religious allegiance and conviction are no issue at all compared to the gravity of improper behaviour. Another first-generation (Fieldwork 1) informant, the same Gujarati I have referred to earlier, explains: "To us Hindus being religious means that you do a lot of Puja, rituals. If you do a lot of rituals, then you are very religious". Elsewhere, in describing the sort of activities that go on in a temple in India, he says: "You do the religious things you are supposed to do [at the temple], but you don't think about it. It's just something you do, like breathing".

As a final illustration of the dominant trend of praxis-orientation, I will refer to a conversation I had with a young man during a puja function organised by one of the smaller Indian associations in Oslo. He had not lived in Norway for very long. When I asked him whether he often attended functions like this, he somewhat regretfully said that since he was not very religious he didn't come often. He would have liked to be more religious, though, but

⁹⁸Now and then informants refer to religiosity as a visual quality – see the other quotes supplied in this chapter. Observes V.P.Kanitkar: "The practical demonstration of faith is all-important to Hindus, who maintain that their faith depends on it" (V.P.Kanitkar 1994:114).

⁹⁹ The notion that "there is so/too much to explain" is commonly set forward by informants as a reason for the not uncommon avoidance of explaining their Hindu traditions to inquisitive Norwegians. This trait is discussed elsewhere in the thesis.

he felt it was difficult to be religious living in Norway. When I asked him if not religion was something that resided in the heart, and as such a sentiment that was quite possible to entertain even in Norway, it seemed as if he didn't quite know what to say.

The quotes above are examples of the dominant view on how informants understand "religious". We see that the examples can also be interpreted as information on the meaning behind the adage "Hinduism is a way of life".

Let us turn to some examples of the secondary, less dominant trend. In these examples religion and religiosity is primarily associated with attitudes, feeling, inner disposition, or points of view/abstract values. I begin with a quote from Kamlesh:

Kamlesh: I often reflect upon that had I married an Indian boy, I would have moved to India. In that case I think my thoughts in connection with religion mostly would have been preoccupied with practicalities. Doing the right thing, instead of thinking about – the thing that you always have to explain that you are a Hindu, like you have to here. Those women [in India] think more about the practical and don't have the time and space to think and reflect.

Kamlesh's reflection upon her situation draws a picture of religious life in India as a matter of what you do, as well as suggesting that her own orientation regarding religiosity as an inner matter (evident from the general context of her interview) may be connected with the fact that she lives in Norway.

I mentioned above how the two different main trends can be present in the same interview. These extracts from the interview with Shubra are examples of how different trends can be mixed into each other:

Q: Is there a difference between being religious and believing?

A: By religious I mean someone who believes in – the gods, like we can see them, in physical form, in pictures. I don't sit down much in front of pictures, but I can still be religious. Sometimes I just say a *mantr* [sic] inside myself. But I still don't believe that God has physical shape like they are portrayed in the pictures.¹⁰⁰ I don't sit down much – someone who does I would call a religious person. I am not a practising Hindu.

Q: What does it mean to be religious, in your view?

A: [lengthy pause] It's to pray often. To believe in God as it's described in the pictures. Pray to statues and such, and do puja. That is being religious.

Q: How religious would you say that you are?

¹⁰⁰ Shubra's critical attitude to images may be related to her family connection with the *Arya Samaj*, a sect that discourages the use of idols.

A: I can't lay it out on a scale from one to ten. I think a lot about faith. I think a lot about how to live. In a way I can say that Mom and I are just religious, even though Mom does many rituals at home, and often prays directly to her God. I don't. But still I would say that the two of us are just as religious... Mom, or my parents, have put a lot of importance into praying. They support their faith a lot with *mantr*, a lot compared with me. I mostly have that faith, inner feelings and things like that. My mother also has that inner-feeling thing, she believes very much in the inner voice. But she also has a goddess she turns to when she prays... I don't use *mantr* and rituals so much.

Compared with Shubra, the general tone of Gopal's interview comes down more clearly on the side of the secondary trend, as this example illustrates:

Q: What is religious?

A: That you believe in God, I'd say. Beyond that I don't know.

Q: Do you think it is mainly connected to things you do, or to attitude?

A: I think it has to do with attitude. I think that a man who prays often, follows the rituals and says mantras doesn't have to be more religious than somebody who keeps it to himself, for example somebody who just sits on the Underground and thinks about it and believes in God in his own way. I don't think he is less a religious person than someone who does puja twice a day.

Kavita is an informant who has given considerable thought to the relationship between what you do and what you believe in religion. She is especially interesting in the context of this chapter, as she appears to make a conscious choice in favour of belief. I quote Kavita rather extensively in order to convey to the reader a better feel of her thinking. The lengthy quotation also does better justice to her thoughtful and personal approach to spirituality:

Q: Let me ask what being a religious person means?

A: I don't quite know. Some say that being religious means that you follow the different [sic], for example the Muslims follow the Koran, the Christians the Ten Commandments. Hinduism follows Ramayana, Gita, and so forth. But I think that I am religious as long as I believe in God, as long as I believe there is something more than just us. Then I am religious. But if you ask other Hindus what I am, they wouldn't describe me as religious. But I must honestly say that I believe in something... Most religions have rules like you're not supposed to smoke and drink, and if you break them, you're not religious. But that's just a matter of other people's opinion about you. Your own opinion can be that you believe in something, and so be religious. But being religious is a question of what you mean by that word. I feel that I am religious. I don't sit and pray aloud. If I feel bad I pray, and if I feel good I give thanks. I just say the prayer inside myself when I pray. It means that I believe in something or other which isn't nearby, a power I can't see. When I pray I just pray in my heart, when I've gone to bed, or during daytime too. It depends on the situation. It's nothing that you can see.

Q: Is there a difference between your and your parents' religiousness?

A: There isn't so much of a difference, because I think this is how our family is. But there is the small difference that they like to stand in front of the altar once in a while. Maybe sometimes I do too when I'm in Mom and Dad's room. The Hinduism of our family is maybe a bit different from some other Hindu families...

*Q: You tell me that you sometimes pray in your heart and think about God. Is that what you would call belief?*¹⁰¹

A: Yes, I would say that I am both religious and that I believe – in something. But as I said earlier, others would say that I am not religious since I don't go to temple or stand with a *pujathali*.¹⁰² Yes, I can say that I believe in something, and that is why I am religious. In my view I am religious, though not in the way that others see it, the family's way – I have always felt that I believe. When they [the parents] have told me to pray to *Sheranwali*,¹⁰³ and when I do, that's religion and belief. But they have never told me that I have to go to mandir or do certain things. In India there are many people who are concerned about going to certain holy places or temples a certain number of times a year, and that you then will get the things you have prayed for. I hardly believe those things. But then I'm not raised in India. Had I been, maybe I would have believed it, but what use would it be anyway?

The interview selections cited above exemplify two general trends in the data, where informants either identify praxis as a dominant component of religiosity or, in a secondary trend, where attitude and mindset are emphasised. Informants that come under the secondary trend often point out or imply that theirs is a personal view, and not the view of Hindus in general. This trend seems to be an example of influence from Western conceptualisations of religion.

An interesting aspect to the usage of the term “religious” among Hindus, as outlined here, is that Norwegians and Hindus might actually be talking about completely different things even though they are using the same language, the same words and terminology. This is because many Norwegians, in my experience, tend to associate religiosity with things like mindset, conviction, disposition, and less with praxis, as the majority of informants do.¹⁰⁴

- What Are the Differences between Hindus and Christians?

Sometimes a useful exercise in getting to know a community can be to explore its notions of the other, as discussions of the other can frequently be interspersed with contrastive

¹⁰¹ Translation note: The English terms “faith, belief, believe” are all covered by the same Norwegian term “tro” (verb and noun), which is the word used in the interview, conducted in Norwegian.

¹⁰² A vessel used for puja; essentially a tray used to keep offerings in.

¹⁰³ A female deity popular among Punjabi Hindus. Said to be a form of Durga, she is depicted mounted on a lion.

¹⁰⁴ The way Norwegians and informants use the word “religious” differently seems to be an example of what Spradley calls semantic differences within the same language (1979:18-19).

references to self. References such as these can give the researcher valuable information about a community's self-understanding. In the examples below we can follow what informants think about Hinduism in a context of discussions on Christianity.

Among Hindus it is not uncommon to come across the notion that Hinduism basically is not so different from other religions. Many, Hindus and sympathetic Westerners alike, would like to see this as a realisation of what is often perceived as an intrinsic tolerance and broadmindedness of Hinduism.¹⁰⁵ What seems to be an exemplification of this idea among informants is taken from my interview with Gopal:

Q: What do you feel are the main differences between Hinduism and Christianity?

Gopal: [Long pause] Actually, I don't know. I think all religions basically are the same. The goal is the same, but the method is different. The only big difference I can think of is that Hinduism has so many Gods. Also maybe that there are different rules, such as that Hindus are not supposed to eat meat.

Gopal is not the only informant who says he is uncertain about the differences between the two religions. Shubra expresses related notions: "From what I have studied about Christianity, I find that Christianity and Hinduism have many of the same moral messages". Kavita too shares this ecumenical outlook:

Father says that all are the same...my impression is that Hindus don't think there is such a great difference [between Hindus and Christians]. God is God. We even have a statue of Jesus at our family altar! ...Basically I could just as well say that I am a Christian. After all I am religious, I believe in something.

Vinita, while discussing the ethical and moral values of her tradition, by implication supports Shubra and Kavita: "The stories about the Gods show us all the values we should have in life. I can have all those values, of course, but the fact of the matter is that a Christian can also have the same values!" Vinita's statement is interesting in the general context of her interview, where as we have seen, she is often vocal about her discontent that her own tradition does not seem to offer solutions and answers to many of her questions. She laments her dilemma in not being able to find out what Hindu beliefs consist in, and what it is that differentiates Hindu beliefs from the many positive values she sees in other religions. So she wonders what to believe in. "What is it that makes me a Hindu? Respect and love? All

¹⁰⁵ The idea can be traced to the influential writings of Vivekananda (1863-1902) who based on the teachings of his Guru Ramakrishna (1834/6-1886), argued that all religions have an underlying unity. See Brekke 1999:212-213 and W.G. Neevel 1987:210.

religions believe in that. If we don't know what we believe, what is it that makes us Hindus?", she says.

Along with the similarities, informants also point to differences between Hinduism and Christianity. Like Gopal above, two other informants point to differences related to theology (many Gods), rules and rituals. There are, however, certain other differences suggested that I would like to draw attention to in view of the general theme of this chapter. As examples I present a couple of passages where differences between Hinduism and Christianity are discussed. Kavita relates an experience that many Hindus are likely to subscribe to:

I notice that religion is practised in a different way among religious Norwegians. It's much clearer that you can only get accepted by God if it's Jesus you believe in, or you read the Bible. If you don't believe in them you won't get accepted into heaven, and you end up in hell.

From Shubra I have selected the following two extracts:

Hinduism is much more vague [than Christianity]. It accepts much more than Christianity does...I feel that Christianity has more boundaries.

...the thing about converting people, encouraging people [to convert] even when they are not interested, that constant harping, they [Christians] should leave it...They keep explaining and arguing in and out about Christianity and why it's so good, and why it's better than my religion.

From the discussion above, we see how most informants either feel that there are few differences between Hinduism and Christianity, or that they are unclear as to what these differences are. In a few cases differences are described in more concrete terms. In those cases informants tend focus on the issue of the relative value and significance of contents, beliefs and conviction.

As a rule informants think of Hinduism as much less particular than Christianity on the issue of doctrine. This fits in with the relatively low emphasis on ideology in dharma.

- About Rituals

The impression that Hindus are less concerned about ideology also forms when we listen to what informants say about rituals. Ideology appears to be of little importance in the following accounts:

Gopal:

Q: Do you know what the inner purpose of rituals is?

A: I don't know. I don't think it's to please God. Maybe it's more to remind humans about religion, so they won't forget it. The rituals are God's way of reminding you that you are religious and that you have to pay attention to different things. What the original meaning is I don't know.

Shanti:

Q: What does prayer mean to you?

A: It means – there is no meaning behind it. It's not conscious or something like that when I do it. I just do prayers for the sake of doing it. Because I feel a need for it. There is no meaning in it in the sense that it means a great deal to me. I just do it because I feel like it.

Gopal says simply that he does not know what the purpose of rituals is, and Shanti explains that the ritual of prayer has no meaning to her. Both statements are fairly representative of the sort of views people offer when asked to explain the meanings or symbolic contents of various Hindu rituals. An example from my Gujarati friends (Fieldwork 1) conforms with this pattern. While talking about how their kids like to watch videos about Ramayana and Mahabharata, the husband says: "Both me and my wife we try to explain sometimes what the stories mean. But there are so many stories that are hard to explain." His wife adds: "I think they just watch, they don't go so deeply into it [the story]. I don't know so much about it myself".

- Responses to Questions about Meanings

While talking to informants I now and then sensed a vagueness in the answers I got in response to certain types of questions, as is suggested in the statements above about ritual. On top of that, it seemed as if some questions didn't "compute" – as if the problem was of a different order than a straight-forward want of the information that I asked for. These might be questions related to beliefs and meanings, as the example from Shanti that I cited on page p. 123, where she says that you can't see she is a Hindu. Below are more examples of this phenomenon from two of my Fieldwork 1 informants. Both relate to questions about meanings.

The first example is taken from the interview with the Brahmin informant, who is also cited earlier. Asked what being a Hindu means to him, his short reply was: "In practice Hinduism is no problem". I found the brevity of his answer somewhat puzzling. Out of a sense that perhaps "Hinduism" was too general a term, I tried asking him what it means to him that he is a Brahmin. This time he offered more information. Yes, being a Brahmin is

important to him, he said, though the main thing about being a Brahmin, in his opinion, is trying not to be sceptical towards others and discriminate against others, regardless of caste. Even so, he emphasised, certain rules must be followed, though unfortunately he doesn't always succeed in following them. As examples of such rules he says he must shower everyday, wash before eating, be clean before he recites the mantras and lights candles in connection with puja. Caring for others is also a part of the rules he must follow.

The other example is taken from an interview with a Gujarati couple (the husband here is the same Gujarati family man I have referred to a few times earlier). When I asked what religion meant to him and his wife personally, it appeared that they somehow were stuck for words in trying to formulate a reply. So, in an attempt to concretise somewhat, I followed up by asking the meaning of religion in their daily lives. This rephrased question produced an unrestrained answer which in fair detail describes how the couple greet Krishna first thing in the morning when they rise and how, when they leave the house, when they get back from work, and when they start their car they do the same.

The answers from the Brahmin and the Gujarati couple fit into a pattern where queries about meanings and explanations seem to cause uncertainty, in contrast to queries about praxis.

- Summary

Table 1 summarises the main trends uncovered in each of the contexts discussed above:

Table 1: Main Trends in Interviews

A. Context	B. Most dominant trend	C. Less dominant trend
1. Notions on the content of Hinduism	Little concern, fuzziness	Some specifics mentioned
2. What is religious?	Related to action	Related to mindset, attitude
3. Differences between Hindus and Christians	According to informants: Hindus have little concern for beliefs, Christians are more particular	Discontent about lack of information on Hindu beliefs
4. About rituals	Little concern for meaning, symbolic content	None or limited data
5. Responses to questions about meanings	Uncertainty, little concern	None or limited data

The relationship between the dominant and less-dominant trends in each of the five contexts can be interpreted in terms of tension. This is clearest in contexts 1, 2 and 3 of the table.

Taken together, the data shows evidence of what we could describe as shift between praxis and ideology as centre points for the conceptualisation of religion. Using various scholars, the following section looks at this shift in a theoretical perspective.

9.3 Theoretical Perspectives

Breaking human experience down into a table of neat rows and columns has the weakness that it tends to belie the complexity of its subject matter. Table 1 is no exception. But sometimes the simplification offered by a table can be useful to clarify a line of argument. Trying to make use of this advantage, I will use Table 1 to discuss how we can pull together the various trends in the data, and show how the dichotomy praxis vs. ideology can be a useful tool for interpretation.

I commence the discussion with Frits Staal. In his important book *Rules Without Meaning* (1989), Staal proposes the idea that the key to interpret Asian religions (including Hinduism) lies in recognising that primacy is accorded to ritual as an end in itself, and further, that it ultimately has no inherent cognitive or symbolic meaning. It follows from his argument that since Hinduism's primary concern is the correct enactment of ritual, questions of right belief have a low priority. About ritual he says: "The important thing [in ritual] is what you do, not what you think, believe or say. In India this has become a basic feature of all religion, so that we should refer, not to the faithful or orthodox, but to the orthoprax (from Greek *orthos*, "right" and *praxis*, "action")" (Staal 1989:116).

Staal discusses at length how the salient differences between Western and Asian religions can be seen as springing from their different emphases on doctrine/meaning and ritual/praxis. For this reason Western and Asian religious forms are in some sense incommensurable. Failure to understand this, he argues, is a cause of error on the part of Western scholars when interpreting Asian religions: "To Western scholars, Indian religions only make sense if they express ideas. To Indian practitioners, ideas are optional" (Staal 1989:155). The reasons behind this type of misunderstanding lies in the historical Christian preoccupation with the symbolic interpretation of ritual, and, according to Staal, "in the nature of Western religion, which is pervaded by the notion of exclusive truth and claims a monopoly on truth" (Staal 1989:393). Staal's approach to Hinduism can be summarised in this quote: "[A] Hindu may be a theist, pantheist, an atheist, communist and believe whatever he likes, but what makes him a Hindu are the ritual practices he performs and the rules to

which he adheres, in short, what he *does*” (Staal 1989:389). A one-liner from informant Vinita is irresistible in this context: “Hinduism doesn’t have slogans.”¹⁰⁶

The attractiveness of Staal’s description lies in that it offers a perspective on informants’ preoccupation with religion as praxis and a correspondingly low concern for content, as is shown in contexts 1 and 2 of my table above, as well as their concept of Hinduism as a fairly non-doctrinal religion in context 3. His approach also offers a useful perspective on the low concern for content and meaning in general, as is suggested by the data collected in contexts 4 and 5.

In a clever emulation of the Sanskritic penchant for ranking and categorisation, Gerald Larson builds a finely calibrated typological chart where a number of religions are plotted according to various attributes, amongst these whether they can be described as “cognitively determinate” or “indeterminate” (Larson 1995:174,175). His term “cognitive indeterminacy” describes the nature of South Asian religion as opposed to the “determinate” quality of Western religions that rest on clear-cut systems of belief. According to Larson’s typology, South Asian religions come down for the most part on the indeterminate side, meaning that they allow for a great diversity in matters of belief and a correspondingly low concern for correct belief. In support of his argument, Larson cites S.C. Dube’s criteria for belonging to the Hindu faith, one of which is “minimal cognitive participation” (Dube 1983:1, cited in Larson 1995: 198). The conclusions that can be inferred from Larson’s approach are close to those argued by Staal, and allow a similar interpretation of the trends shown in my table. Larson’s analytical system does not, however, include a category for quantifying the relative importance of praxis, or “ritual”, in Staal’s terminology.

Bryan Wilson explains important differences between Asian and European religion in terms of the historical development of Christianity in Europe. The teaching of the Church became that rites could not suffice in bringing about salvation, and creed became the central issue. In Eastern religions, on the other hand “...the formulations of an internally coherent and systematically ordered set of intellectual propositions [i.e creed] has not been so predominantly a concern either for scholars or for the laity” (B. Wilson 1982:64). West. W.C. Smith states to the same effect: “[I]n the Christian tradition, radically more so than is true of most others, there has been a sustained and central emphasis on formulating the faith in prose, from the Apostle’s Creed to the most recent volume of Tillich’s systematic theology...The peculiarity of the place given to belief in Christian history is a monumental

¹⁰⁶Here’s another good one: “A Hindu is one who knows how the rituals are performed, but who doesn’t know what they mean” (Professor Knut A. Jacobsen, University of Bergen, in personal communication, April 2002).

matter, whose importance and whose relative uniqueness must be appreciated” (W.C. Smith 1978:180). Elsewhere he discusses how notions of attitude, conviction and piety have come to be valued higher than rites, a tendency that is especially pronounced in Protestant thought (W.C. Smith 1978: 44-50).

Some observations from Burghart on the nature of Hinduism complement the arguments above (Burghart 1987: 225, 238):

Most Hindus practice their religion without ever asking themselves what Hinduism is. If questions are asked they concern such topics as the procedures of worship and the benefits to be gained from it [p. 225]. Hindu rituals are usually thought to be effective regardless of whether or not the actor actually understands the ritual; all that is important is the correct enactment of the procedures...[T]he category of meaning...does not figure prominently in Hinduism [p. 238].¹⁰⁷

Parallel conclusions can be drawn from Michaelson’s (Michaelson 1987:33, 46) work on the Lohana community in Britain (I have also used her work in the context of the previous chapter). A field study by researchers Jackson and Nesbitt point in the same direction regarding the relative importance of cognitive knowledge and meaning (Jackson and Nesbitt 1993). On page 10 in this oft-quoted study, we read: “According to many Hindu adults in Britain their children know little or nothing of their own tradition, and there is relatively little in the anthropological literature to challenge this.” And further, on page 93, as a comment to the category of meaning: “Knowledge and correct repetition of mantras (words and phrases charged with sacred power) are of more importance to many Hindus than a [sic] intellectual understanding of the ‘meaning’”.

The theoretical and empirical work of the scholars above coincides with the data presented from my own field material in this chapter. Applied to the theme of the previous chapter, it also gives useful perspectives on legitimisation strategies found among informants, in that it clarifies the problems connected with using explication as a legitimisation strategy in the context of a praxis-oriented discourse, where meanings play a lesser role.

The theories discussed have in common that they utilise a built-in contrastive strategy in their approach, by describing and interpreting Hinduism in terms of a set of characteristics that more or less correspond to a set of contrasting characteristics in Western religion. On the Western side emphasis is placed on characteristics such as meaning, faith, beliefs, cognition. Asian religion, and by implication Hinduism, is characterised by what are understood as

¹⁰⁷ For more context, see pp. 225-245

oppositions to these, such as praxis, ritual, “cognitive indeterminacy”. These oppositions may be schematised into the following set of binary oppositions:

Table 2:

“Western religion”	“Asian religion”
Meaning	Non-meaning
Praxis as non essence	Praxis as essence
Belief as essence	Belief as non-essence

I have selected to express the combined set of oppositions in terms of a dichotomy between praxis and ideology. Ideology then sums up everything related to e.g. meanings, cognitive knowledge, faith and beliefs. Praxis comprises aspects related to ritual, custom, high concern for prescribed action and a matching low concern for doctrinal issues.

Under the theories discussed, my data can be interpreted as evidence of how second-generation Hindus are caught up in a dynamic of push-and-pull between Western influences and the Hindu tradition (i.e. dharma), a dynamic which is structured according to the various oppositions that I discuss. The way I have ordered the data in Table 1 above seems to offer empirical support for these theories. In a broad sense, Column B then represents a set of characteristics of Hinduism, and column C represents a set of characteristics of Western religion. To the extent that we can detect a movement between these two sets of characteristics in the field data, we can argue for a shift in the conceptualisations of religion among young Hindus in the direction of host society concepts, i.e. a shift from praxis and to ideology.

Burghart shows how this approach can be fruitful in understanding certain changes in diaspora Hinduism. According to him, although meaning in religious experience is traditionally not invested with value in the Hindu tradition, there are indications of an increasing recognition of this category among diaspora Hindus (Burghart 1987:237-238). The answers given by many of my own informants, especially those that belong to the less-dominant trend in context 2 (cf. table 1 above), bear interpretation as expressions of a push-and-pull effect. A relevant example is informant Kamlesh’s thoughts on how religion to housewives in India is a matter of practicalities, whereas to her, due to her situation in Norway, religion is a matter for thought and reflection.

The issue of terminology needs a few comments. I argue that the usage of the term “meaning” in the theories accounted for above, is unsatisfactory in some respects. Although the term is obviously being employed in a technical sense, it still has not shed completely

some of its flavour from common usage, where “meaning” is understood as a desirable contrast to non-meaning, meaninglessness, and to an extent, an antonym to chaos. For this reason even the ostensibly neutral technical usage has an unintended evaluative side to it. This can be avoided by introducing the notion of different *kinds* of meanings as an analytical and interpretive aid. In this perspective, to copy the broad labelling strategy of Staal, one can say that “Indian” (i.e. Hinduism) and “Western” religions operate in two different semantic zones, generally speaking. In Western religions, a sense of “meaning” arises in a context of belief, conviction, and all the other aspects that I have pointed to, to be summed up as ideology. The type of “meaning” which is experienced by the adherents of Asian religions is generated in a context of praxis. Perhaps *meaningfulness* is a term better suited to my argument. In any case, by using my terminological framework of praxis-ideology in conjunction with the substance of the theories discussed, the dynamics that I have noted in the data can be interpreted as a drift, or at least a tension, between two different kinds of semantic zones. These two zones are characterised either by praxis or by ideology. Under this interpretation, the data suggests that the experience of religion among some informants is shifting towards the vicinity of the semantic zone of Western religions. In other words, meaning in, and meaning of, Hinduism is increasingly being found in values that belong in the slots under column C of the table above. I suggest “Protestantisation” as suitable term to describe this process, insofar as it has similarities with some aspects in Protestant thought, for example the notion of salvation by faith and not by works.

Finally, as an alternative to the contrastive East-West discussion so far, we can recall Timothy Fitzgerald’s theory as a tool that can explain change in diaspora Hinduism as the result of a push-and-pull effect between tendencies that are indigenous to the tradition.¹⁰⁸ These tendencies are described in terms of two senses of dharma, the first being that: “The importance of correct ritual action in the fulfilment and maintenance of cosmic order is paramount, whereas notions of faith and inner personal commitment are not” (Fitzgerald 1990:112). And the second: “[I]t inclines towards free choice of personal devotion instead of ascribed status and duties...” (Fitzgerald 1990:113). Fitzgerald argues that a case can be made for aligning the first sense with traditional Indian culture and the caste system. The latter sense is what corresponds most closely with Western religion, he says (Fitzgerald 1990:113). The two senses cannot be seen in isolation of each other, he maintains, as the empirical reality in India (and as in my data) is a mixture of the two ideal types. “However, when the Dharma 2

¹⁰⁸ I introduced Fitzgerald’s theory in chapter 6, “Who Can Be A Hindu?”

sect moves from its Dharma 1 context to somewhere like England, it is obviously becoming discontinuous in some important respects with its origins.” (Fitzgerald 1990:114) Fitzgerald’s essentially sociological approach offers a useful view on questions of continuity and discontinuity in the study of diaspora Hinduism, and of a shift from praxis to ideology within the framework of the tradition. Under this approach, columns B and C of Table 1 are then to be understood as roughly representing Dharma 1 and Dharma 2, respectively.

9.4 Conclusion

In this chapter the interviews with my informants are analysed with a view to learn about the relationship between ideology and praxis in informants’ conceptualisations of religion. The data is rationalised within the framework of a postulated dichotomy between ideology and praxis.

To recapitulate, we find that informants often display little evidence of ideological concern in terms of the content of Hinduism, although some specifics are mentioned. When informants are asked about religiosity, we find that meanings are not the issue, but praxis is. Interestingly, we find in this context a few dissenting voices who reject praxis as a mark of religiosity. To them, religiosity is mainly related to aspects like mindset, inner disposition. When discussing differences between Hindus and Christians, ideology again gets a low score. In connection with questions that involve rituals and meaning in general, it seems fairly clear that praxis outweighs matters ideological. Each of these themes refer to one of the five contexts of table 1.

When we take all of these contexts together, we discover a fairly low level of ideological orientation among informants in general. A distinctively praxis-oriented discourse is felt throughout. However, the analysis at the same time reveals evidence of a tension between praxis and ideology. Among some informants, this tension seems to be giving way to a shift in emphasis in favour of ideology. Evidence to this effect is most clear in those contexts where informants talk about their notions on the contents of Hinduism and what they associate with religiosity.

The theories of Staal, Larson, Smith and others allow an interpretation of this as evidence of change in the direction of Western conceptualisations of religion. These theories may also make it possible to understand change as the result of influence from host society ideas, although the data offers scant information on the mechanics of such a process. I proposed “Protestantisation” as label for this process. Into the theoretical discussion I inserted

some terminological remarks on the usage of “meaning”. I presented the idea that different types of meaning may be a better way of describing differences between Western and Asian religious experience, as opposed to meaning vs. non-meaning. Fitzgerald offers a different perspective, where change is understood as an expression of a movement between currents within the tradition. In any case, I would like to assert that regardless of the explanations for these changes, we should also be open to the possibility that the dominant cultural influence will tend to reinforce and legitimise those already existing components of the minority cultures that are similar to itself.

The issues discussed in the present chapter raise some interesting questions about future developments in diaspora Hinduism. One such question is what can supplant the diminishing observance of rituals in a religious tradition where praxis virtually defines the religion, as some scholars suggest. What then becomes of the religion? Does it disappear or does it change? In what way does it change? Perhaps these words from Kavita can give some input:

[I]t is not so easy to follow these rituals, because you are very dependent on having a temple...Many of the rituals are impossible to do here, and you never see them done. So I will probably teach my children to believe in something good. I won't tell them to stand in front of the altar five times a day.

PART 3

CONCLUSION

10 CONCLUSION

The thesis began by asking: *How does Hinduism as a belief system change when it exists in a Northern European cultural environment?* Utilising on my fieldwork data, I investigated the question from different points of view, but always within a perspective of conceptualisation. The choice of perspective meant that my focus was on what young Hindus think *about* religion, rather than on what they actually do or specific beliefs. By setting their thoughts about religion, i.e. conceptualisations, against certain aspects of dharma (what I refer to as the closest approximation of what the word “religion” means in conventional Hindu understandings), I arrived at a method in which to order the data, and to develop an interpretation. Hence, by considering the extent to which informants’ views conformed with or departed from dharma, I was able to draw conclusions about changes in informants’ conceptualisations of religion.

An example of how I use the conceptualisation perspective can be seen in the first chapter of Part 2, “We Hindus and I”. Here I explored informants’ thoughts and feelings about religion in terms of the relationship between the collectivity and the individual. Is religion to them a collective undertaking, or is it an individual pursuit? I asked.

Analysis of the data showed, the reader recalls, that family and community - the collectivity - play an all-important role in informants’ religious activities and thoughts about religion. I concluded that, to most of my informants, religion is seen as an entity which is intimately associated with the collective that a person is part of. These informants’ thoughts about religion conformed well with the conceptual framework of dharma, which among other things places much emphasis on the persons’ social situation and responsibilities. The data also showed that several informants are searching for a more personal path in religion, an experience exclusively their own. I interpreted their desire for a more individualistic religious

experience as a sign of change and departure from dharma, and potentially a sign of host society influence.

Each of the chapters in Part 2 follow the same strategy of examining the data on informants' conceptualisations of religion from a particular perspective and then interpreting the tendencies I found in the data in relation to dharma and Western European conceptualisations of religion. Each chapter also pointed to a number of new questions and perspectives that are not discussed further. I mention a few here, that I recommend following up for further research.

The fieldwork interviews contain a great deal of information that I either did not use in the thesis, or that I only mentioned in passing. This information often hints at an array of topics for follow-up research. For instance, several informants mention that they prefer to go to the temple only rarely. What would their attitudes be to organised activities, such as are presently growing around the Slemmestad Hindu temple? Questions like this can open new and separate field of inquiry, in this case touching on issues such as the young and fledgling "congregationalisation", to strategies for passing on the tradition to the young.

Although gender-related issues were not a direct concern in the thesis, I would like to highlight my discovery in the data of an occasionally markedly stronger tendency towards individualism and universalism among woman informants than among males. These observations trigger new problems and questions. First of all, one would wish to establish whether or not the data are an indication of general tendencies to be found in a wider sample. Secondly, the obvious question arises as to why are women seemingly more receptive to some of the aspects of Western conceptualisation of religion. We might further ask whether such a potential gender divide could be attributed to sociological differences between the genders that, in turn, affect their susceptibility to cultural change in the diaspora situation. The question would also have to be addressed of whether there are other explanations that may be grounded within the traditions of Hinduism.

What may be seen as a corollary to the inclination of women towards individualism and universalism are some suggestions in the data that women may be less conscious of caste than men. Unrelated to gender, other scattered data from my own fieldwork, as well as reports from other researchers, indicate that the Hindu caste hierarchy may be undergoing a process of simplification in diaspora. These features invite the curiosity of a South-Asia researcher.

An observation that I found particularly interesting was the tendency among some informants to question the dominant role of praxis in the Hindu religious tradition. As an example of this tendency, I quoted informant Tushar, who said: "I think that a man who prays

often, follows the rituals and says mantras doesn't have to be more religious than somebody who keeps it to himself ...I don't think that he less a religious person than someone who does Puja twice a day." Observations, like this one, that indicate a lessening significance of praxis raise questions about future developments in a tradition where praxis holds an all-important position. The question acquires special immediacy, I think, when coupled with other tendencies in the data that represent a departure from dharma. The de-linking between religion and culture, an increasing individualism and a growing demand for new types of explanations and legitimations were some of the tendencies that I pointed to. In the context of tendencies such as these, a process of fairly radical re-conceptualisation among second-generation diaspora Hindus in Norway seems to be no remote prospect. The attentive reader will assuredly be able to pick up many more topics in the thesis that could prompt further research.

The tendencies and findings that I have presented in the preceding chapters are empirical data that contribute to validate a central premise of this study, namely that an understanding of dharma is a necessity to interpreting developments in diaspora Hinduism that are conceptual in nature. This, precisely, is because dharma functions as a supplier of premises and assumptions for conceptualisations of religion among Hindus. In this sense the concept of dharma defines a centre of gravity in Hinduism, and thereby also functions as a reference point from where to assess the direction that certain developments in diaspora Hinduism are taking.

Parenthetically, it is tempting to suggest that since, in my argument, the notion of dharma plays such a fundamental role in the Hindu tradition, it seems that Hinduism could profitably be described as the "Religion of Dharma". The idea is hereby floated for someone else who might wish to pick it up.

I have made much of the conceptualisation perspective in this study. One of the ways in which this approach is useful is that it alerts us to features in the fieldwork data that we otherwise might miss. For example, as I have argued, a sensitivity to conceptualisation makes it possible to detect significant types of change that occur even though there are no major observable changes occurring in praxis. I have also argued that changes that do occur in conceptualisation are *not* necessarily contingent on changes that occur in praxis. A distinction between praxis and conceptualisation thus enables the researcher to capture a broader spectrum of the religious experience of a diaspora community. Awareness of such a distinction should also introduce an added measure of prudence on the part of the researcher

when pronouncing on the interpretation of and the significance of the facts such as he understands them.

Treading therefore with caution, I venture that in addition to improving a researcher's methods of observation and analysis, the conceptualisation perspective additionally permits interpretation of certain tendencies in the fieldwork data as a shift towards a variety of religion that in its conceptual features is typologically Western. This in spite of the non-Western origin of this religion, and the fact that its immediately observable, praxis-related features would undoubtedly qualify it as Hinduism. The conceptualisation perspective could conceivably be used to demonstrate similar processes going on in other immigrant religious communities long-established in the Western world, viz. European Islam or Buddhism.

On the face of it, it would seem that the obvious explanation for an increasing similarity with Western conceptualisations of religion would be the "import" of host society cultural assumptions into the diasporic religion in question. This assumption is open to question in some cases, however, since the driving force for change cannot always be positively identified with imported host society cultural assumptions. As I have argued, partly by using the theory of Timothy Fitzgerald (e.g. in chapter 6), a case may be made for the possibility that it is the context of diaspora that activates certain strata already embedded within the tradition. This does not, of course, exclude the possibility of combinations of both.

Problems of explanation notwithstanding, the thesis identifies how informants' conceptualisations of religion converge with certain conceptual features in Western European religion. Moreover, the thesis exemplifies that even though conceptualisation structures may change, even to the extent that these structures typologically resemble those of Western religion, members of a diaspora religious community may yet retain an allegiance and a clear sense of identification with their ancestral religious tradition.

The ability of my informants to perform this feat offers testimonial to the malleability of human tradition, thus justifying my designation for the process as a shift in dharma.

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GLOSSARY

(diacritical marks are omitted).

Arti – (H.) ceremonial waving of a lamp in front of the image of a deity as an offering of light during a puja. (Pronounced with a long initial A).

Arya Samaj – Hindu reform movement founded in 1875. Wide following among Punjabi Hindus.

Aurora – Caste designation.

Baniya – Caste designation.

Bhagavadgita – Well-known sacred text among Hindus; slightly smaller than the New Testament in size. Forms a small part of another well-known sacred epic, the Mahabharata. The B. is generally thought by scholars to be composed around 200 A.D

Bhajan – Devotional song, hymn.

Brahmin – Caste designation. Members of the Brahmin category of castes are considered highest in the hierarchy of castes. As a rule only Brahmins are supposed to perform the rituals in a temple.

Devanagari – The Sanskrit script which is also used for Hindi and some other modern Indian languages.

Dharma – Sanskrit term often translated as “religion”, sometimes as “tradition”. See my discussion of this term in chapter 4, “Dharma and Western Religion”.

Dhamma – Pali (old Indian language, sacred to Buddhists) form of the Sanskrit dharma.

Diwali – Festival of Light, one of the most important of the Hindu festivals, and marker of the beginning of a new year in the Hindu calendar. Celebrated in Oct/Nov. Different mythologies are associated with this festival, one of them being the restoration of the rule of the good king Rama.

Durga – Goddess

Gita – Popular short form for Bhagavadgita.

Hawan – Fire offering. A very old ritual which is used in the Arya Samaj tradition.

Ishtadeva – The chosen, or preferred, deity to whom a believer owes his sole or main allegiance.

Karvachaut – Observed in autumn, an annual one-day fast undertaken by married Hindu women who offer prayers seeking the welfare, prosperity, well-being, and longevity of their husbands. Widely observed among Punjabi families in Norway, according to informants.

Khatri – Caste designation

Kirtan – Communal singing of hymns.

Krishna – Male god.

Kshatriya – Caste designation.

Mahabharat/-a – Name of a Hindu sacred epic, the longest epic poem in the world. The name is derived from one of its main motives, the story of the Bharatas and their descendants.

Mandir – Dwelling, palace (of the gods), i.e. a temple.

Mantra – Skrt.; Sacred syllable, word or phrase used aloud or internally for chanting, recitation in connection with worship or meditation. Many Hindus attribute mantras with the power to achieve various effects, for example peace of mind, mental or emotional strength, closeness to God, and others. In Western English usage it is sometimes used in the sense of something like a “buzzword”.

Moksha – Hindu equivalent to “salvation”. From Sanskrit: release, liberation from rebirth in the world.

Namkarana – Ceremony of name-giving to a new-born child.

Pandit – Scholar; priest. Generally used as an honorary title, but occurs also as a proper name. The word has entered into Western English usage, usually in the meaning of “a wise person, an expert”. Often spelled “pundit”.

Patel – Caste designation. Also a surname common among Gujaratis.

Puja – Worship, ritual

Pujathali – Tray or plate used in connection with Puja for offerings to the god. Literally: a “puja-plate”.

Rakshabandhan – Annual ritual, where a sister ties a band of protection, a rakhi, around the wrist of her brother: A girl can also offer a rakhi (popular short form of R.) to a non-related male who she loves as a brother.

Ram/-a – Male god, popular among especially North Indians. One the symbols associated with Ram is the bow and arrow.

Ramayan/ -a – Sacred epic/myth about the god Ram.

Rig Veda – The oldest portion of the Veda texts, which Hindus consider the source and foundation of Hinduism. The R.V. is probably the oldest preserved religious text known. The Vedas texts consist mainly of collections of sacred hymns, varying in date by scholars to a couple of centuries before or after 1100 B.C.

Sampradaya – A sectarian tradition; designation for a line of a teacher-pupil succession.

Sanatan Dharm/-a – A term for the central teaching of Hinduism about the cycle of the cosmos under the law of dharma; also used to designate orthodox, or pure, Hinduism. Often used as a term for non-sectarian, popular, Hinduism, as most of my informants do. Literally, “Eternal Law” (Sanskrit).

Sheranwali - A female deity popular among Punjabi Hindus. Said to be a form of Durga, she is depicted mounted on a lion.

Shiv/-a – Male god. Among his most well-known symbols are the trishul (a three-pronged spear) and the linga (a phallus-symbol).

Swami Narayan – Common designation for a sectarian tradition from Gujarat, in Western India. Named after the founder-teacher of a line of succession, Swami (=teacher, honorific) Narayan, who died in 1830. The official name of the sect is “Bochasanwasi Shri Akshar Purushottam Swaminarayan Sanstha”. It is known, among other features, for its ornate temples in and outside India.

Varna – From Sanskrit, literally: “color”. Original Sanskrit designation for caste. This has changed over time, so that each of the originally four varnas now contains many castes. A varna is in effect a group of castes. E.g. Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaishya, Shudra are originally designations for the four varnas.

Varnashramadharma – Skrt.; Hindu social theory that prescribed the duties for the different stages in a person’s life, according to which of the four classes of society, or varnas, that he belonged to.

Sources:

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- Fieldwork data

APPENDIX

INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR FIELDWORK 2

The interview guide is in Norwegian. All interviews with Fieldwork 2 informants were conducted in Norwegian. Not all of the questions in the interview guide were used in every interview, cf. “Method of Fieldwork”.

Fakta-oversikt:

Intervju nr/dato	
Intervjusituasjon - hvor:	
Språkferdighet (1-3):	
Kjønn, alder.	
utdannelse, studier, jobb:	
Foreldres utdanning/jobb:	
Født hvor?	
Familieforhold.	
Familien fra hvor i India:	
Hvor ofte i India?	
Deltagelse i foreningsliv, alene eller med foreldrene?	
Ferdighet hindi/lese hindi, sanskrit?	
Bor hvor? Eget mandir hjemme/på hybelen/på rommet?	
Gift?	
Kaste:	
Favorittguder/hvilke guder tilber dere hjemme?	
Guru?	
Familiens tradisjon:	
Venner blant andre hinduer.	
Kristendomsundervisning?	
Min vurdering av informantens kjennskap til kristendom og kristne	
Generelle inntrykk:	

Innledende spørsmål:

1. Har du mange hinduvenner på din egen alder? Pleier dere å snakke om religion sammen?
2. Fortell litt om ditt forhold til hinduismen. Skole, venner, osv. Skoleforedrag?
3. Hva svarer du når folk spør hva din religion er?
4. Viser du for andre at du er Hindu? Hvordan signaliserer du for omverdenen at du er Hindu?
5. Hva pleier folk å spørre om mht din religion? Hva svarer du?
6. Føler du at folk av og til spør om ting som det er vanskelig å spørre om? Er det fordi du ikke vet, eller fordi du føler du kanskje mangler ord?
7. Hva tror hinduene på?
8. hva er essensen i hinduismen?
9. Hvis du skulle svare for deg selv; hvorfor er du Hindu?
10. Kristendomsundervisning? Hvor mye synes du at du vet om kristendom? Mange kristne venner? Diskuterer dere ofte religion?
11. Hvordan har du lært om hinduismen? Foreldre? Selv?

Valg mm:

12. Kan man velge å bli Hindu? Kan man velge å ikke være hindu?
13. Kunne en nordmann bli hindu om han ville? Hva mener du om det?
14. Tror du hinduismen er bra for andre også? Evt hva?

Bønn/mantraer/puja

15. Hva betyr Ram /Krishnan for deg? Hva liker du best ved dem?
16. Ber du? How do you pray?/meditate? Where?/when?/hvordan-hvor lenge. Hva tenker du på da?
17. How often do you pray? / Hva pleier du å be om?
18. How do Puja?
19. What rituals do you do?
20. Hvilke mantraer kan du? Leser du i bøkene? Hvilke? Hva er ditt inntrykk mht andre unge hinduer, om de leser noe?
21. Hvilke myter kan du best? Hvorfor er Krishna blå feks?
22. Hva betyr ritualene for deg?
23. Hva gjør/hjelper ritualene for?
24. Hva føler du når du ber/mediterer/gjør puja?
25. Hva tenker du på da?
26. Hvorfor deltar du i ritualene?
27. Hva er ritualenes indre betydning?
28. Føler du at det er sider ved ditt religiøse liv som kan være for private til å snakke om?

Om Gud osv.

29. hvordan er gud?
30. What does God do for you?
31. Hva slags ting forventer Gud av deg? evt: Hva slags saker gjør du for Gud?
32. hvor ofte tenker du på Gud?
33. Hva betyr din religion for deg? - hvordan påvirker din religion ditt liv og din hverdag?

Tro/religion mm

34. Hva er betydningen av dharma?
35. Hva er religion?
36. Hva er åndelighet?
37. Hva er tro?
38. Hva vil det si å være religiøs?
39. er du religiøs/hvor religiøs er du?

Norsk kultur mm:

40. Øl, røyk, norske venner, dans, kjæresten etc.
41. Hva vil det si å være hindu for deg?
42. Gå det an å skille mellom feks religiøse hinduer (de som utfører religiøse handlinger), troende hinduer (de som ikke gjør så mange religiøse handlinger, men som tror i sitt hjerte) , kulturelle hinduer (de som ikke tror, ikke gjør handlinger, men som kanskje feirer Diwali og følger andre skikker)?
43. Hva er forskjellen på deg og dine norske venner?
44. Ditt inntrykk av andre hinduer her: Hva legger de i religionen? er hinduer mer religiøse enn nordmenn, synes du?
45. Hva er hinduismens mest sentrale verdier?

46. Hvilke ting tror du selv mest på i Hinduismen? Det at du tror mest på/lite på... kan det ha sammenheng med at du bor i Norge, tror du?
47. Er det noe i norsk kultur du synes er verdifullt, og som du tror hinduismen kanskje kunne ha nytte av å ta inn i seg?
48. hva er forskjellen på hinduisme og andre religioner?
49. Spørre mer spesifikt: Hva er forskjellen på kristendommen og hinduismen
50. Tror du det er en forskjell på hvordan hinduer og kristne opplever sin religion?
51. Hvilke ting i krdommen liker du? Noe du synes hinduismen kunne bruke? Eller omvendt?

Perpetuation of the tradition

52. si litt om påvirkning/egne observasjoner: Egne tanker. hvilke områder?
53. Om hinduismens muligheter for å overleve i Norge. Dine tanker om hvordan den vil utvikle seg med tiden?
54. Hva er det i så fall i hinduismen som gjør at den kan overleve, langt borte fra et hinduistisk miljø?

TRANSCRIPT FROM INTERVIEW WITH SHANTI

(Interview 7, Fieldwork 2)

About the Interview:

Interviewer: Ram Gupta.

Transcript: Transcribed by Ram Gupta from tape-recording.

Language of interview: Norwegian.

Place of interview: Café in Oslo.

Duration of interview: c. 2 hrs.

Note: The informant sometimes uses English words and phrases that I reproduce as they occur. The transcript has been edited so that all recognisable biographical and personal information is deleted. It is not possible to recognise the informant on the basis of information in this transcript.

Explanation of signs used in the transcript:

Q: my question.

R: reply from informant.

[]: My comments/clarifications/additions.

(...): Omission in the transcript due to disturbance or unclarity in the sound of the tape recording.

...: Informant takes a pause, hesitation.

@: This sign means: "The informant says that" [my paraphrase follows after this sign].

#: This sign means that direct quote from informant continues after paraphrase.

Numbers refer to tape counter.

Interview follows.

Side A:

000

Q: Hva svarer du når folk spør om din religion?

R: Jeg sier jeg er hindu.

Q: Hva pleier folk å spørre om?

R: De spør om hva slags språk vi snakker, om vi feirer jul osv. Det er sånt de spør om. Da pleier jeg å svare at vi ikke feirer jul, men at vi gir hverandre gaver.

Q: Er det greit å si at du er hindu, eller er du flau for det?

R: Nei, jeg er ikke flau for å si at jeg er hindu. @var ikke flau for å si det da hun var yngre heller. [I motsetning til flere andre informanter som sier de var flaue da de var yngre].

012

Q: Kan man på noen måte se at du er hindu?

R: Eneste jeg har som er synlig er et halskjede hvor det står Om. Det er det eneste, ellers ser du det ikke.

@forklarer at det er Om dersom folk spør. Det er tegn for Gud, akkurat som korset i kr.dommen.

Q: Hender det at folk spør om ting du synes er vanskelig å forklare?

R: De spør av og til om ekteskap, om foreldrene presser deg til å gifte deg. Sånne spørsmål irriterer jeg meg ganske mye over. Men jeg sier jeg ikke vet ennå. Selv tror jeg ikke det kommer til å skje, men en vet jo aldri. Plutselig dukker ting opp som du må greie å konfrontere.

@foreldrene mine er mye mer åpne enn de fleste indiske familier er. De fleste indiske familier jeg kjenner er fra Punjab, og de har innmari strenge foreldre.

#Det er 2 år siden jeg begynte å bli kjent med andre indiske familier. Da jeg gikk på gymnaset var det bare en pakistanske jente jeg kjente fra andre kulturer. Jeg føler jeg ikke egentlig har vært borti noe egentlig flerkulturelt fellesskap - mest bare norske.

033

Det er først da jeg kom på Blindern jeg begynte å bli kjent med flere indere. Det var da jeg fikk greie på at det er et innmari strengt miljø det også.

Foreldrene er strenge på at når du går ut må du gjøre avtale om når du kommer hjem, og hvor du er. Det med gutter og jenter - siden jeg var liten har jeg alltid hatt gutter som gode venner. For meg har det vært rart å høre om at det var noe de andre indiske jentene måtte passe veldig på og sånn.

Det er veldig mye baksnakking blant foreldrene og andre indiske folk. Jeg tror det er mindre blant indere enn det er blant pakistanere. (...)

Q: Hvorfor er du hindu?

R: Hvorfor jeg er hindu?... Fordi...foreldrene mine er hindu [kort latter].

Q: hender det at du snakker om eller diskuterer hinduisme med andre indiske venner?

R: Egentlig veldig lite. Jeg er ikke så veldig opphengt i det å være hinduist, eller religion i det hele tatt. Jeg blir ikke venn med deg fordi du er kristen eller muslim. Jeg har aldri hengt meg opp i akkurat det (...) aldri vært opptatt av å vise frem at jeg er hindu.

Q: Hvor har du selv lært om hinduismen?

R: Jeg lærte ganske mye i livssynstimene på ungdomsskolen. Men jeg har også sett mye av hva det vil si å være hindu når jeg har vært i India. Hjemme har det egentlig vært ganske lite av det. [undervisning].

Når vi drar til mandir, feks, ser jeg hva man gjør og hvordan man behandler religionen.

Hjemme har vi hatt veldig lite av det - ikke så veldig mye.

Altså, religion for meg-jeg er mer opptatt av yoga og meditasjonsaspektet ved hinduismen.

Det har mer med din personlighet å gjøre. Det at du må be eller gjøre et eller annet så og så mange ganger-jeg er mer interessert i det som har med å bli et bedre menneske (...).

Det er innmari mye fint å hente fra hinduismen. Selv har jeg lest noen bøker om det også.

Q: mediterer du?

R: Jeg gjorde det før. Da jeg var i India nå sist deltok jeg på et yogakurs i en uke i [en by i India]. Da måtte vi bo på det stedet og følge en dagsplan fra morgen til kveld. Vi måtte følge en plan for når vi skulle stå opp, og når vi skulle legge oss, hvilke øvelser vi skulle gjøre. Vi måtte be om lov for å gå ut fra det stedet og vi måtte spise den maten de lagde der. Jeg møtte mange hyggelige folk. Vi var 20-25 stykker, og blant dem en jente fra Frankrike, en fra USA, og folk fra andre steder i India. Det var ganske OK. Jeg har alltid interessert meg for det.

078

Q: Hva er kjernen i hinduismen?

R: Kjernen i hinduismen?... For meg vil det...altså jeg liker - hinduismen for meg er det at jeg kan ...utdanne meg til et bedre menneske, for å si det sånn. Det er ikke bare en ting, det er flere ting.

Q: Kan du nevne noen viktige ting som er bra ved hinduismen?

R: ...mmm...jeg nevnte det med yoga og meditasjon og alt det der. Det er det jeg har fått ut av hinduismen. Veldig mange fine sitater, og mye du kan lære - moral og etikk og alt det der. Det er mye man kan hente ut. Også buddhismen, som kommer fra hinduismen, en får veldig mye ut derfra. Det er veldig mye likt. Det er moralen og etikken - det er det jeg liker mest.

087

Q: Vil du si du er veldig opptatt av og bevisst på at du er indisk?

R: Nei, jeg er ikke det. Kanskje det er fordi - det er veldig vanskelig å si at du er indisk når du bor her i vesten. Jeg er jo født og oppvokst her. Det eneste jeg har er hudfargen og indiske foreldre. Det å være indisk...jeg merker jo forskjell, for jeg er jo ikke helt integrert i det norske miljøet.

Q: Hvordan da?

R: Det med å gå ut på pub, feks. @hun drikker ikke øl, røyker ikke, ikke kjærester
Hjemme er de spes. obs på at hun ikke flyr rundt med muslimer. Foreldrene synes det er forskjell på å bli kjent med norske eller andre, feks om der fra Kina, Filipinene og andre asiatiske land. De er spesielt oppmerksomme på om hun blir kjent med muslimer. R forteller dette er noe hun har lagt merke til fra foreldrene de siste par årene.
#Det har med bakgrunnen deres å gjøre. Det har jo alltid vært konflikter mellom hinduer og muslimer i India.

110

Q: Kan en nordmann velge å bli hindu?

R: Jeg tror det er mulig. Det er innmari mange [nordmenn] som har valgt den linjen, feks Hare Krishnafolka, de har gjort en ganske bra jobb.

Q: Hva synes du om Hare Krishnafolka?

R: Jeg vet ikke...noen ganger synes jeg det virker litt tåpelig når de står ute på gata og [synger]. Er du troende synes jeg det holder at du er troende innvendig. Du trenger ikke gå rundt og skrike at du er troende.

Q: Vil du betrakte HK som troende?

R: ...De har jo blitt tilhengere av hinduismen. Jeg vet ikke helt hva jeg skal si.

120

Q: Dersom en norsk kamerat kom til deg og sa han ville bli hindu, hva ville du si at han måtte gjøre?

R: ...altså...hva gjør jeg da?...jeg ville anbefale han å gå til mandir og spørre folk der. Jeg tror ikke jeg er den rette til å spørre om det.

Q: Hva tror du faren din ville sagt?

R: ...han ville sikkert ledd.

Q: Er det mulig for en hindu å si at han ikke er hindu lenger?

R: Det går helt sikkert an. Da måtte jeg vel valgt noe annet enn hinduismen...jeg vet ikke hva det måtte blitt.

Q: Tror du hinduismen er bra for andre?

R: Jeg synes det, ja, både hinduismen og buddhismen. Det er de to religionene jeg respekterer mest. Jeg synes de er bra for andre. Men hind. er så stor, og alle ser jo forskjellig på hinduismen. Sikhismen, feks, det er en gren av hind. De ser på hind. som annerledes enn det jeg ville gjøre. Så...jeg vet ikke. Noen ganger virker religion så tåpelig også, for man tolker det på så innmari mange forskjellige måter. Det å be 5 ganger daglig, og så behandle folk [forskjellig]- Jeg kjenner noen familier som er svært ortodokse - de ber og holder på med prayers osv. Men ellers forskjellsbehandler de folk. Sann som de hjemme. Men om du trekker de gode tingene i hind. skal du ikke forskjellsbehandle folk og si at det er en muslim, det er en hindu og det er noe annet.

Det viktigste for meg ved det å ha en religion er å ha et åpent sinn. Det synes jeg er hinduismen. I alle fall er det det hind. har gitt meg.

@Hind. har gitt henne svar på ting hun har spurt om og lurt på, feks "Who Am I", spørsmål angående livet.

#Filosofiske spørsmål, for å si det sann. Hind. sier ganske mye om sanne spørsmål. Den gir ikke noen eksakte svar, men får deg til å tenk mer.

Q: Hvem er du da?

R: ...hvem er jeg, ja...hvem er jeg?

Q: Hva skjer feks etter at du er død?

R: Jeg tror at Atman, ditt indre vesen, lever videre. Når du dør, dør kroppen og spiriten lever videre. (...)

Det har jeg sett tegn på i India. Jeg hadde en fetter som døde i en bilulykke. Moren var innmari lei seg da han døde, og hun ba mye og sa mange mantras hver deg. Etter 1-2 år fikk hun en datter som ble født på samme dag som fetteren døde på, og som lignet helt. Det er en del sanne ting i India som jeg har sett. (...)

Jeg tror på sjelevandring.

Q: Tror du på karma, at om du har gjort i et tidligere liv...?

R: Det tror jeg mindre på. Jeg tror heller på nåtiden, at om du gjør det bra nå så blir det bra nå. Det med karma, det tror jeg ikke så mye på. Jeg har ikke tenkt så mye på det.

Q: Hva vil det si å tro?

R: ...[lang pause]...R henviser til at de snakket litt om dette på gymnaset, hva det vil å tro, i forbindelse med filosofi på skolen.

#Det å tro er en ting, slik som jeg tror på sjelevandring - det er ikke at du vet en ting, men at du føler sterkt for det. Det er en sann indre følelse. Når jeg har en sann indre følelse, da tror jeg på noe.

Om noen spør meg om jeg tror på Gud, da vet jeg ikke helt hva jeg skal svare. Jeg pleier å be, men ikke slik at jeg ber om ting jeg vil Gud skal gi meg. Det er heller det at jeg behandler Gud som en venn og sier det jeg har på hjertet. Om det er noe religiøst i det vet jeg ikke. Men det er sann jeg ser på saken.

@moren har et annet forhold til gud og det å be.

#Det er to forskjellige ting. Hun ser ikke på det som en helhet, slik jeg oppfatter det. Jeg sdr på det hele som en helhet på den måten at når jeg ber da bruker jeg det [det som har med bønn p gjøre] i dagliglivet også. Det er ikke slik at jeg har en spesiell tid for bønn, og glemmer det

etterpå. Jeg ser på livet og bønn som en helhet. Det er veldig mange familier jeg har sett som skiller de to tingene, slik at det med Gud hører til på et sted og alle andre ting et annet sted. De behandler begge tingene forskjellig. Jeg mener at mange av dem er trangsynte. De har ikke et åpent sin.

@man ser at de er trangsynte på at de leser mange [religiøse] bøker og er veldig opptatt av etikk og sånn, men de forskjellsbehandler folk hvis du er hindu eller muslim, feks. Det mener jeg er ganske trangsynt.

216

Q: Hva betyr Ram, Krishna, Siva osv for deg?

R: Jeg ser ikke på dem som forskjellige [dvs adskilte vesener]. De er en alle sammen. Det er en kraft bak alle sammen. (...). Men hver for seg har de et forskjellig budskap. Feks Ram er rolig og hjelpsom. Krishna er mer naughty, kind of, spøkefull. Ganesh - visdom. Shiva er control your emotions, you know.

Det er veldig mye forskjellig å hente fra dem alle sammen.

Q: hva betyr gudene for deg?

R: ...friend. Det er sånn jeg ser på det.

232

Q: Gjør du puja, feks på rommet ditt?

R: Når jeg ber står jeg foran det lille mandiret som jeg har lagd. Det er puja for meg. @hun folder hendene og står en stund. Ingen faste tidslengde. #Det kommer an på hva jeg har å fortelle. (...) Føler jeg meg sta og sur akkurat da står jeg kanskje rett frem med haka. Er jeg glad pleier jeg å si thanks. Noen ganger står jeg bare med hendene på ryggen.

@Måten hun ber på har hun lært fra hun var liten. Hennes måte å snakke med gudene har hun lært fra kusinen sin i India.

#Hun gjør prayers hver morgen og kveld, og sitter gjerne å senga noen minutter når hun ber. Hun [kusinen] fortalte meg at jeg burde gjøre det fordi det gir en god følelse. Behandler du gud som en venn istedenfor en som bare straffer deg når du gjør noe galt, da blir det mer distansert. Men hvis du behandler Gud som din venn og dere snakker sammen...hun anbefalte det med prayers, og det var da jeg begynte med det for ca. 1/2 år siden.

@R ber ikke helt regelmessig.

#Før jeg begynte med prayers gjorde jeg noe lignende, jeg mediterte. Jeg lærte det delvis gjennom bøker, og noe [i forbindelse med fritidsaktiviteter som hun holdt på med i et norsk miljø]. En lærer kom fra England og hadde småkurs om healing, meditasjon og yoga og alt det der. Og siden har jeg vært interessert i det.

Q: Hva betyr bønnen for deg?

R: Det betyr...det er ikke noen mening bak det. Det er ikke målbevisst eller noe sånt hver gang jeg gjør det. Jeg bare ber for å gjøre det. Fordi jeg føler behov for det. Det er ingen mening i det på den måten at det betyr noe sånn særlig for meg. Jeg gjør det bare fordi jeg har lyst.

Q: Hva sier foreldrene dine om det?

R: De sier ingenting. Da jeg kom tilbake til Norge fra det yogakurset i India pleide jeg å sitte i de forskjellige asanas. De så at jeg gjorde det, men de sa ingenting. Det var bare greit, liksom.

287

Q: hvilke mantraer kan du?

R: Jeg kan en, Gayatrimantri, som jeg lærte i India. Det er veldig lite å lære omd et her fordi folk har så forskjellige meninger. Og så synes jeg folk er så innmari trangsynte, så får ikke et godt bilde av hinduismen. Og så er det veldig personlig hva du har lyst å hente fra Hind. Da jeg var i India nå møtte jeg igjen en familie som jeg lærte veldig mye av. De levde på det spiritual plan [sic - engelsk], spiritual level, på en måte. Når vi prata med dem følte du deg veldig opplyst, jeg vet ikke helt hva jeg skal si.

Hun [moren i familien?] fortalte meg en del ting om hinduismen og hvorfor ting og tang er sånn og sånn. De fleste tingene jeg har lært har jeg fått fra folk i India.

@hun har holdt på vanen fra barndommen om å tenne røkelse foran Gud etter å ha badet.

Q: Tror du ritualene hjelper for noe?

R: ...[tenker lenge] alle ritualene er jo der for at de skal show the way, ikke sant. Vise deg veien til gud. Jeg husker jeg diskuterte det med den familien i India. Feks finnes en mandir i [en by i India] hvor du ikke får lov å be til gud om du har på deg bukse og T-skjorte, men det går hvis du har på deg sari. Og det synes jeg er rart. Her kommer den trangsynte ideen inn i bildet. Hvorfor kan du ikke ha på deg bukse og være forskjellig? Alle er jo barn for gud [dvs guds barn?], alle er jo like.

Men hun forklarte også at disse ritualene var noe annet før og er blitt noe annet nå. At du må bade før du går [og ber] og ha på deg sånn og sånn klær for at du skal vise renhet og at du innvendig er renselig, at du har respekt for gud. Men nå er det blitt gjort om. Folk har tolket det som regler og lover for hvordan du skal komme nærmere gud og sånn. Det har blitt gjort veldig mye om.

335

Q: Er det sider ved ditt religiøse liv du synes er for privat til å snakke om?

R: ...[tenker lenge] jeg synes det med menstruasjonen. I India er det veldig hysj-hysj. Feks i livssynstimen på ungdomsskolen så ble vi fortalt at før i tida var det sånn at når jenta fikk menstruasjon gikk moren ut og var glad og fortalte alle i byen og landsbyen at jenta var vokst opp og sånn.

Men i India er det veldig hysj-hysj, og du må ikke fortelle det og du må holde det hemmelig. Jeg syntes det virket helt komisk, for her i Norge er det helt åpent. Ingen som trenger å holde det skjult i det hele tatt. Men i India er det veldig mye av det.

Hun [moren?] i den familien jeg ble kjent med fortalte at det var egne ritualer for det før. Når jenta fikk menstruasjon fikk hun lov til å slippe å gjøre alt arbeid. Hun fikk lov til å sitte i en krok, slapp å hente vann fra brønnen og gjøre husarbeid. Det er etter hvert blitt tolket slik at jenta skal sitte i en krok, og ingen får røre henne, og hun får ikke røre seg fritt. Det er blitt sånn at jenta er blitt uren. Slik er det blitt tolket opp gjennom årene. Det er et eksempel på hva slags ting indiske foreldre henter fra India når de kommer hit.

Det er eksempler på ting jeg ikke kan snakke åpent om hjemme i India, for da blir bare folk sjokkert. Det er sånne ting jeg ikke skjønner helt. Men jeg vil ikke si at det er hinduismen akkurat, for det står ikke i hind. at jenta er uren når hun har menssen. Men det er bare blitt tolket sånn - det er sånn det har blitt.

374

Q: Hvordan praktiseres forholdet til menstruasjon i indiske familier du har kjent her?

R: @tror ikke det er slik blant de indiske familiene hun kjenner her nå. I India ligger de langt etter.

Q: Hvorfor nevnte du menstruasjon da jeg spurte om private sider ved religionen?

R: Jeg tenkte på en del jenter som jeg møtte i India. For dem var slike ting veldig private, og det har vært det for meg også. Jeg var veldig sjenert da jeg var liten, og er vel det nå også.

390

Q: Hva er ritualenes indre betydning?

R: Det er det med å ... følge deg frem til gud.

Q: Hvordan er gud?

R: ...Han er vel snill han! Jeg vet ikke, jeg har jo ikke sett gud. Hvordan er gud? Gud er i alle fall en god følelse, det vet jeg.

404

Q: Hvilke egenskaper har gud? Hva gjør han?

R: Jeg vet ikke hva gud gjør. Da jeg tok yogakurset lærte jeg at jeg ikke skulle bekymre meg for noen ting fordi gud er det, og han vil ta hånd om alle slags problemer. Det er forutbestemt alt sammen. Så, you don't need to worry. He'll take care.

Q: Tror du på det?

R: Da jeg var i India ble jeg overbevist. Dette var nytt, og kult, syntes jeg, noe jeg aldri hadde tenkt på før.

@hun har ikke vært oppmerksom på snakk om slikt hjemmefra.

#Jeg tror også på en annen ting som gjelder spesielt for meg, at hvis jeg bare driter i alle ting og bare tar ting for gitt, så får jeg problemer. Jeg må jobbe for saken. Det er ikke slik at jeg kan få til alt bare ved å basere meg på talentet mitt.

@hun tror ikke at suksess er forutbestemt, men at du må jobbe for det. Og om hun jobber med ting har hun også muligheten til å forandre på ting selv. Gud hjelper henne på veien dersom hun jobber for et mål, forutsatt at det er en god sak.

Q: er gud god?

R: ...ja, han kan være god...han er god hvis jeg er god, og ond hvis jeg er ond.

@forteller at synet hennes på gud vil være avhengig av om hun planlegger noe godt eller ondt, for gjør hun noe ondt vil gud være mot henne og lage vanskeligheter for henne.

Q: Er gud sterk og allmektig?

R: Jeg vet ikke. Jeg har aldri sett på gud som noe personlig. At han er fysisk, eller en ting, det har jeg aldri tenkt på. (...) Det gode, that's God. I det siste har jeg tenkt på at gud kan være vennskap. Hvis vennskapet lever, da lever også gud. Gud er det gode. Han kan være kjærlighet, troskap.

Q: Er gud allvitende?

R: Om han vet alt sammen? Mulig. Jeg har ikke spurt.

SIDE B:

011

Q: Hva vil det si å være religiøs?

R: Du kan ikke se på meg at jeg er hindu. Noen sier du ikke kan se på meg at er indisk en gang!

Jeg pleier å få en rød tråd på meg når jeg er på kirtan. Folk pleier å spørre hva den tråden er, og da svarer jeg at det er her kraften min ligger-litt på tull. Jeg har vel ikke svart noe på det egentlig. Sier bare at det er en tråd - bare noe jeg har på meg. Jeg vet ikke selv hva jeg skal si - det blir så mye å forklare, og da gjør jeg det ikke. Før hadde jeg også en sort tråd rundt halsen som skulle beskytte meg mot onde ånder, som jeg fikk i tempel i India. Når folk spurte om den tråden i Norge spurte de om jeg trodde på det, og da sa jeg ja. Her i Norge går jo folk med krystaller og stener som skal bringe lykke, og ellers betyr det samme. Når det er rakhi pleier jeg å binde en sånn på broren min. Folk i klassen hans spør sikkert hva det er, men jeg vet ikke hva han svarer. Jeg har tenk på det at folk sikkert spør.

Q: Hva betyr åndelighet og spiritualitet?

R: Det er jeg veldig interessert i. Jeg har lagt merke til at du gjennom meditasjonen kommer i forskjellige nivåer. Jo dypere en kommer, jo mer forandrer du synet på livet. Nå er det lenge siden, kanskje ett år, siden jeg mediterte. På det ene året har jeg blitt mer materialistisk, noe som plager meg, for jeg føler meg veldig nært knyttet til det åndelige.

Men jeg har hatt en periode hvor jeg har prøvd å rømme unna det åndelige, det spirituelle. Jeg har prøvd å holde meg mer virkelighetsnært. Her i Norge er det slik at snakker du om det åndelige forbindes med sånne alibaba-kadabra ting, langt unna virkeligehten og sånn. Det er sånn jeg hører folk snakke om på treninga, i hvert fall. Folk sier ofte hver gang jeg prater at "du er så filosofisk av deg".

I India er det åndelige og det virkelige ett. Det går i ett. Der sier ingen at "du er så filosofisk av deg". Det spiritual thing, that's the life. Her er det sånn at du kan se en klar og tydelig forskjell på det åndelige og det materialistiske. Det har jeg lagt merke til. Her blir det så splitta.

Jeg prøver å holde det åndelige og det spirituelle sammen. Men jeg greier ikke å være enten på den åndelige siden eller den materialistiske siden. Nå har jeg lit problemer med si hvor jeg er. Men jeg tror på det åndelige. Det er noe du føler innenfra.

060

Q: Henger åndelighet først og fremst sammen med ting du gjør, eller er det noe annet?

R: Ikke nødvendigvis ting du gjør, fordi ... det åndelige...det som skjer når du mediterer er at du kan komme nærmere, eller bli mer oppmerksom på det åndelige. Feks da jeg trente [navn på øvelse] opplevde jeg i tilstander av dyp konsentrasjon under øvelsene at du blir mer oppmerksom på det merkelige inni deg.

Men alle har en indre stemme som de kan høre på, eller just ignore. Det er en kraft, på en måte, og du kan føle den kraften. Den kraften har alltid vært der, også før jeg begynte med øvelser. Merkelig.

Q: Hvilke ting i hind. tror du mest på?

R: Det åndelige.

Q: Hva er forskjellen på hind. og andre religioner?

R: Hind. og buddh. er veldig like for meg. Det er ingen stor forskjell på dem, bortsett fra at det er ingen gud i buddh. Islam og krdom er veldig like, men i krdom og islam er det mer fokus på gud, hva han er og hva han vil og sier. Men jeg har aldri hørt at gud sier noe. Det eneste jeg hører er det jeg føler (...).

Det irriterer meg at de fleste kriger er på grunn av religion. Men slik blir det vel om du trekker ut det negative av alt. Det jeg synes er bra med hind/buddh er at de fokuserer mer på mennesket selv, dets indre, mer enn at du må gjøre det eller det som gud sier.

Jeg har ikke lest [om] hind. Jeg har sett Ramayan og Mbh. på video. Der fokuseres det også mest på mennesket, gode gjerninger og menneskets indre vesen. Hvordan du skal kontrollere dine følelser, og følge viljen og fornuften.

Det er mer filosofisk, for å si det sånn. Mens i krdom og islam - feks en kristen venninne av meg hun tok det for strengt at du må gå i kirken for å be, vise gud at du er troende. For meg er det greit å gjøre prayers hvor som helst. Gud er jo alle steder.

100

Q: Hva vil du kalle prayers på norsk?

R: Å be. Jeg vil ikke si be en gang, for det høres så rart ut. Kanskje ikke be en gang...ja....

Q: Er det ting i norsk kultur du føler er såpass verdifullt at hinduismen kunne lære av det?

R: ... egentlig ikke. Jeg synes det er fint at nordmenn er veldig åpne på en del områder, men det har ikke noe med religion å gjøre. Dette er typiske karakterer ved vesten som kanskje østen mangler på grunn av alle tradisjonene og religionene og hvordan ting har forvandlet seg til hysj-hysj og sånn.

Jeg tror ikke folk i India helt vet hva hind. er selv, inkludert hinduer her og meg selv. Det er veldig få som vet hva hind. er. Den har etterhvert blitt vanligere [mer alminneliggjort?], og blitt kultur, på en måte, som stadig forandrer seg. Men hind. er noe helt annet enn hva de fleste oppfatter den som, føler jeg.

Men jeg vet helt selv hva hind. , for jeg tolker den på min måte. For meg er det viktigste å ha en open mind, å ikke være trangssynt. Du blokkerer ganske mye av livet om du ikke har et åpent sinn. Jeg føler jeg ser klar forskjell på åpne og trangsynte folk. Men er jeg selv trangsynt?

123

Q: Ting i krdom du synes er bra?

R: Jeg har ikke satt meg så veldig godt inn i krdom. Jeg har ikke lest bibelen.

Q: Vet du hvorfor Jesus døde på korset?

R: ...jeg har en vag forklaring, men jeg vet ikke helt eksakt hvorfor. Han døde for folket. Det lå jo et budskap bak det hele.

Q: Vet du hva er krdommens viktigste budskap?

R: Har ikke det noe med å gjøre mennesket godt? Bak alle religioner er vel det gode det mest sentrale, å gjøre andre mennesker godt. Det ligger i alle religioner. Det var en sadhu som sa at det er en sol, men solen har forskjellige stråler. Det [betyr at] det er en kraft som har forskjellige retninger, de forskjellige religionene. Men alle strålene fører frem til en sol, til en ting. Om du er kristen eller hindu er målet det samme. Men jeg vet ikke hvorfor alle disse konfliktene er på gang. (...).

149

Q: Tanker om påvirkning fra norsk kultur?

R: Ungdommen tror jeg vet veldig lite om hind. Du kan ikke si at de er religiøse. Ungdommen er mer frittlopende - tilhører ingen religion.

På fester med indiske ungdommer møter du veldig mye av det norske-mye festing og røyking og drikking.

@R forteller hun har vært med på en del fester med bare indiske ungdommer, ikke vært med rølpefester selv, men har hørt om det med andre indiske ungdommer.

(...)

R kjenner til norsk festkultur, men sier det mye verre i India. I Norge holder folk seg litt mer i kragen. Mer konservative holdninger blant indere her.

#Jeg synes det var rart da jeg var i India og hørte om alle de greiene. Der er det blitt mer moderne enn det er i Norge [snakker om indere i Norge].

Jeg tror folk savner et indisk miljø her. Noe slikt finnes ikke, det er stort sett oppløst nå. [Snakker om organiserte miljøer].

R forteller om en hel - indisk fest hun var på tidligere med dans, god mat osv, men uten drikke. Veldig alright.

195

Q: Hva betyr dharma?

R: ...[tenker lenge]...Dharma er det du gjør utifra et godt motiv. Dine plikter, det er dharma. Min dharm kan feks å sørge for at ingen har det vondt. Dharma og karma henger sammen.

Q: Hva tror du vil skje med hind. i Norge om en generasjon eller to?

R: Det har jo begynt å komme inn i moten, det med å bruke bindi og indiske klær. Det indiske har begynt å inspirere folk. Jeg tror det kommer til å bli ganske mye av det. FEks de Hare Krishna folka. Jeg tror folk kommer til å bli mer obs på hind.

Jeg tror indiske ungdommer vil trekkes mer mot det indiske fordi de ser at alle andre rundt oss gjør det. Vi vil derfor kanskje ikke være så flau for å gjøre det. jeg kjenner en venninne som gikk med indiske klær, og fikk veldig bra respons. Jeg hadde aldri gjort det. Jeg synes det ville være flaut. Men nå som norske gjør det ville jeg kanskje gjøre det jeg også.

227

Q: Er religion noe som sitter mest i hodet eller i hjertet?

R: Tror det er både i hjertet og hodet, for jeg tenker så mye. Tror det er en kombinasjon.

Q: hva synes du om å bli intervjuet om disse tingene?

R: Synes det er helt alright, for dette er ting som stadig dukker opp i samtaler med folk. Men ofte er det ting du ikke gidder å svare på, fordi du bruker så lang tid, og du synes det [svaret] blir for useriøst. Jeg har ofte ganske lange svar, og bruker lang tid på å forklare for jeg vet ikke om jeg greier å forklare de tingene ordentlig. Men når du vil bruke litt tid på det, synes jeg det er alright. Og så får jeg snakket om ting jeg savner å få snakket om. Veldig mange andre ville bare sagt at jeg er så filosofisk og sånn.

Q: Sier dine indiske venner det samme?

R: Ja, men jeg har en indisk venninne som tenker ganske likt som meg. Jeg har ikke snakket med henne på lenge, men hun er ganske åndelig. (...)

De norske sier ganske ofte at jeg er så filosofisk, så etter hvert har jeg bare kutta ut å prate om sånt!

Jeg synes det er gøy å få sjansen til å prate om sånt. @Kunne ikke tenke seg å studere hind. på universitetet. Foretrekker å få hind gjennom folk.

#Å lese om det blir så uinteressant og kjedelig.

261: End of interview.

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ततः प्रमुक्तोऽहं शापात्॥

